

Planting an Herb Garden

Growing herbs is no more difficult than growing flowers and vegetables. They can be classified as either annuals, biennials or perennials. You will usually be successful with annual herbs when planting them along with other annual flowers and vegetables. Treat the perennial herbs as you would ornamentals. Many herbs such as mint, lemon balm and tarragon become established and the gardener has to work to keep them under control. These easily established herbs can be planted in a clay pot which is then sunk into the herb garden to inhibit growth.

Most herbs require full sunlight for 5 to 8 hours a day but are tolerant of partial shade while some enjoy full shade. Most herbs prefer well-drained soil and a gentle incline with sandy soil is ideal. If the garden site you select doesn't have good natural drainage, you may need to utilize raised beds or amend the soil as good drainage is a must for herb gardening. If possible have the soil from the potential herb beds tested for pH. Most herbs enjoy a pH in the range of 6.0 to 7.5.

The gardener may, of course, start herbs from seed but it is usually easiest to buy seedlings from a garden store. They can be easily transplanted from a small container into the ground by following these steps: the day before transplanting, water the herb thoroughly so the root ball and soil will hold together. Make a hole in the garden soil big enough to hold the transplant. Turn the container upside down into your hand. Put the plant into the hole, level the soil and firm up with your fingers to get rid of any air pockets. Water and put identification tags at the base of plants at this time.

Herbs with a short growing season such as coriander and borage, can have their harvest lengthened by successive plantings several weeks apart. Watering herbs is best accomplished by deep soaking as opposed to light spraying.

Herbs do not need heavy fertilization. A spring feeding and again in the summer with a 5-10-5 fertilizer will suffice. Most herbs are resistant to pests and diseases but root disease can plague them...rosemary, sage, oregano and lavender seem to be most susceptible.

All of the books in the herb section of the Master Gardener Library have extensive listings of herbs suitable for planting in our area. A listing of all these herbs would be too lengthy for this article so interested gardeners are encouraged to check them out in the Library.

Additional suggested readings on herbs and herbs to plant include:

McNair, James *All About Herbs*, Ortho Books

Bremness, Lesley *The Complete Book of Herbs*, Penguin Studio Books, NYC, NY

Edinger, Phillip *Herbs an Illustrated Guide*, Sunset Books, Menlo Park, Calif

Daniels, Gilbert *Herbs & Spices*, American Horticultural Society, Mount Vernon, Va.