



### How to Grow Herbs

Herbs are plants used for flavoring foods, medicinal purposes or fragrances. In cooking, herb refers to the green leafy or flowering part, while spice refers to other parts of the plant that are usually dried.

#### Right Plant

- Some herbs will last more than one season.
  - ◇ Annuals — have to be replaced every year. They grow for one season then die. These include, basil, cilantro, dill, etc.
  - ◇ Biennials — live for two seasons, for example, parsley.
  - ◇ Perennials — live for many years and bloom seasonally. These include marjoram, rosemary, thyme, oregano.
- Planting considerations
  - ◇ Herbs such as coriander(cilantro) and dill grow best directly from seeds.
  - ◇ Most other herbs are easy to grow from small nursery starts in the spring.
  - ◇ Mint and epazote should be planted in a pot, otherwise they will rapidly spread and take over the garden.



#### Right Place



- Sunlight: Herbs produce oil during the sunny part of the day which accounts for their flavor; with less sun, they will be less flavorful.
  - ◇ Outside: Grow where they receive 6 to 8 hours of sun per day.
    - \* Some, such as parsley, cilantro, basil, dill may do well with slightly less sun.
  - ◇ Inside:
    - \* Grow in a sunny window where there is sufficient light.
    - \* If sufficient light is not possible, use a grow lamp which has special lights that mimic sunlight.
- Soil: Plant herbs in well-drained moderately rich soil directly in the garden, a raised bed, or a pot.
  - ◇ Use pots with a drainage hole and fill with potting soil (not soil from your garden).
  - ◇ Do not use gravel or other filler in the bottom of the pot – just potting soil. The drainage hole may be covered by a coffee filter to avoid losing soil with watering.



#### Right Care

- Fertilizer: Do not over-fertilize. Too much fertilizer can cause excessive foliage growth with limited flavor.
- Water:
  - ◇ In the garden - regular water according to needs of the plant and if weather is unusually hot and dry. Avoid over-watering.



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- ◇ In pots - check soil frequently and water if the soil is dry to the touch. Some herbs may require water more than daily if very hot weather.
- ◇ Do not let pot sit in a saucer of water.
- Pests: Herbs have few pests; however, some examples of pests include: aphids and spider mites. To control:
  - ◇ Spray insects off with water (some may require daily spraying) early in the day.
  - ◇ Move the pot to a different location if possible. If a large pot, consider using a planter caddy.
  - ◇ If too much damage, consider a chemical control. Make certain the product is labeled for food crops.

#### Harvesting and Drying

- Leaves can be harvested all growing season.
- Harvest leaves for optimal flavor early in the morning after dew has evaporated.
- When harvesting leaves for drying, cut the stems from the plant when the flower buds have formed but not yet opened. Perennials can be cut back by half and annuals to the ground.
- After harvest, wash leaves with cool water and pat dry.
- Herbs can be dried in a dehydrator, microwave, oven, or by hanging upside down in a warm room.
- Storage
  - ◇ Store dried herbs in airtight containers in a cool dark location.
  - ◇ Use within one year for best flavor.



Image: Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

#### Right Help

- Master Gardeners™ <https://bit.ly/MetroMG> for a pest or other problem
- Master Food Preserver <https://bit.ly/OSUFoodPreservation> for questions about drying and preserving foods. The toll-free hotline at 800-354-7319 runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, Summer through Fall. When the hotline is closed, callers can leave a message.
- *Gardening with Herbs* <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/herbs/intro.cfm>
- *Growing Herbs* <https://cmastergardeners.files.wordpress.com/2022/02/growing-herbs.pdf>