

Lavender

Lavandula angustifolia, (common lavender) a beautiful and fragrant hardy perennial addition to the herb garden is used for used for crafting, cooking and landscaping.



Oregano/Marjoram

Spicy flavored Greek oregano (*Origanum vulgare* subsp. *hirtum*) and its milder, sweeter counterpart marjoram (*O. majorana*) are both popular perennial culinary herbs.

Lemon Balm

Melissa officinalis, better known as lemon balm, is a perennial herb with lemon-scented leaves used in teas and desserts.

Parsley

Two types of parsley are commonly grown: curled-leaf parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*) and flat-leaved or Italian parsley (*P. crispum* var. *neapolitanum*). Both types are used in the kitchen although Italian parsley is often the first choice for cooking. Curled parsley is eye-catching and is often used as a garnish. This herb can be grown as an annual or a biennial.

Sage

Sages are perennial herbs that come in a variety of flower colors and fragrances. Garden sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is known as a flavoring for turkey. Pineapple sage (*S. elegans*) produces vivid scarlet-red flowers in the fall. Not all sages are edible and some varieties are grown for landscaping purposes only.



For More Information

Please consider our NGB member companies as authoritative sources for information. At www.ngb.org click on direct links to their websites by selecting Member Info from the upper left menu for the Complete Member List. Gardeners looking for seed sources should select companies listed as Retail.

The National Garden Bureau recognizes The Herb Society of America www.herbsociety.org as the author of this fact sheet.

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NGB
YEAR
OF THE
HERBS



The year of the herbs—what a sweet year it will be because of the endless possibilities in the endless world of herbs. Found in gardens, window boxes, salads, bouquets, crafts, containers and medicines, herbs provide fragrance, flavor, spice and beauty to our lives. They are versatile, easy to grow and come in a variety of shapes, textures and colors.

Imagine cookbooks that never mention herbs, a world without fragrances and air fresheners, or brushing your teeth with no mint in the toothpaste. Visualizations of this sort can lead to the realization of the many ways we interact with herbs every day and to a better understanding of why they are so valued for their fragrance, flavor and medicinal properties.

What the word “herb” really means

A very fitting definition that defines herbs by their usefulness rather than by their appearance or botanical structure was coined by Holly Shimizu, director of the U.S. Botanic Garden. Holly says, “Herbs are defined as plants (trees, shrubs, vines, perennials, biennials or annuals) valued historically, presently, or potentially for their flavor, fragrance, medicinal qualities, insecticidal qualities, economic or industrial use, or in the case of dyes, for the coloring material they provide.”



History

Records reveal Egyptians had an understanding of the healing power of herbs as early as 3500 B.C. The “Ebers Papyrus,” written circa 1550 B.C., lists prescriptions Egyptians used to treat illnesses and injuries. Herbs such as basil, dill, parsley, caraway, mint and thyme were prescribed. It is believed many Chinese herbal practices originated with Emperor Shen-Nong (circa 2737 B.C. — circa 2698 B.C.) who tasted hundreds of herbs. Greek physician, Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.) was one of the first to classify herbs according to their usefulness for treating infirmities. During the Renaissance knowledge of herbs was spreading throughout Europe. In 1492, when Columbus landed in the Americas, the exchange of information and plants that followed had a profound impact upon the use of herbs in Europe. Herbs continue to be used for landscaping, cooking, medicine and beauty products. It is difficult to find a part of the world that has not been impacted by herb plants.



Culture and Garden Preferences

Herbs are generally sun-lovers requiring at least four to eight hours of sunlight daily. Soil should provide air circulation around the roots, good drainage and adequate nutrients. A well-draining silt, sand and organic matter soil mixture with a pH of 6.5 to 7.5 will encourage healthy growth. Most herbs require only limited amounts of fertilizer. Usually adding manure or compost is all that is needed.

Rainfall, soil type and herb variety can affect how much water plants require. Some species, prefer to be a little on the dry side, while others need more moisture. Seedlings and young plants need more water to become established. A periodic soaking that extends deeply into the roots of an herb bed is more effective than several light sprinklings. Mulching will minimize moisture loss and decrease the need for frequent watering. It is not advisable to mulch in areas with high humidity and care must be taken to keep mulch 2-3 inches away from plant crowns to avoid rot.

Harvesting

Method and time vary according to the variety, intended use of the plant, and the season. A good rule of thumb is to harvest in the morning after the dew has dried or early in the evening because the foliage is cooler and the essential oils are at their most concentrated. Harvesting helps maintain the plant's shape and encourages bushy, compact growth. After harvesting,

place the herbs in a paper bag or a bucket of cold water. Drying, freezing, refrigeration, microwaving or making vinegars and oils are ways of preparing herbs for storage.

Ten Common Herbs to Try

Visit the NGB website for more information about these popular herbs along with some suggested varieties to try in your garden.

Basil

Basil plants come in a multitude of different varieties with distinctive fragrances such as lemon, cinnamon, anise, and clove.



Chives

The globe-shaped flowers and the leaves of hardy perennial *Allium schoenoprasum* smell and taste of onions. Garlic chives, (*Allium tuberosum*) have a mild taste of garlic.

Coriander/Cilantro

The leaves of the annual plant *Coriandrum sativum* are referred to as cilantro, while its seeds are called coriander.

Dill

Anethum graveolens can be biennial but it is more commonly grown as an annual. Young dill leaves are referred to as dill weed.

Thyme

Thyme is a hardy perennial that grows well in light, well-drained soil located in full sun. There are many different species, offering variations in leaf color, flavor and fragrance.