

GROW YOUR OWN PHARMACY



ALTERNATIVE
DAILY

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**29 Healing Herbs To Live A
Pain-Free, Happy Life**



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Herb Growing 101

When it comes to eating in a healthy and sustainable way, experienced chefs know that herbs are everything! Tossing in a kick of extra flavor can take any meal from boring to brilliant in no time. It is my belief that no garden is complete without a gorgeous assortment of herbs, ready to season any scrumptious entree, rich dessert or refreshing beverage any time of day. Spice your way to a delicious kitchen in no time!





Herb Growing Tips

I love to grow herbs as they offer not only a wide range of culinary uses, but often medicinal benefits too. Knowing how to identify and grow herbs for medicine is a skill that is very useful — especially if a survival situation occurred. The planting location amount of sun, watering and harvesting time, among other factors, are all important to take into consideration when growing herbs.





Use Starts Or Divisions

A rooted sprig of mint or basil might have been your first experience with growing herbs. Many culinary herbs you buy from the supermarket can be successfully rooted in plain water and potted up, but that doesn't always work out when you want to expand your collection beyond the common herbs.

Many mail-order catalogs offer a wide variety of herb seeds, but it is not advisable to rely on their glowing descriptions. Herbs come from different parts of the world, so there's no guarantee that the ones you buy can survive in your particular growing zone. Their names can be misleading too. There are around six types of sage and three types of tarragon commonly available, for example, but many rarer cultivars could exist.

It is always safer to buy starts from your local nursery or garden center. You get to see, smell and maybe even taste what you're getting. I also enjoy getting herb plant divisions from my fellow gardening friends.



Control Vigorous Herbs

Some herbs are notorious for their prolific growth. They spread in all directions, sending out runners or sprouting roots from wherever their stems touch the soil. Common mint and many of its relatives are typical examples. Given half a chance, they will take over your entire garden and become a menace for years to come. At the same time, no herb garden can really do without them. Growing them in pots, large tubs or other similar containers is the best solution. You can recess the containers in the ground if you want, just sure that you use separate containers for different kinds of mint.

Confining invasive herbs to containers does not work for plants that spread by self-seeding. Chives, garlic chives, lemon balm, chamomile, comfrey, etc. spread their seeds far and wide, and you'll end up having seedlings popping up all over the place. Your only option is to prevent them from setting seeds by either harvesting them before they flower or removing flowers as soon as they open.



Give Full Sun To The Sun-Loving Herbs

Many herbs that have become an essential part of our cuisine originally come from the sunny Mediterranean region. This area is characterized by warm winters and hot summers – all under clear skies. Thyme, parsley, basil, rosemary, sage and oregano are typical examples. Although they have adapted well to different growing conditions in many foreign lands, they thrive when they're provided with their native environment. Plenty of sunlight is one of their basic requirements, and warmth is another. That's why they grow well during spring and summer, but start to decline as fall progresses to a cold winter.

Some herbs like mint, garlic, chives, oregano and lemon balm do well in the sun as well as in partial shade. In fact, the vigorous growth of many sun-loving herbs can be controlled by growing them in shade. Many herbs belonging to the carrot family, such as parsley, cilantro and chervil, sometimes suffer when they are planted in fully exposed areas, especially under the hot summer sun. Providing some afternoon shade is ideal in those situations.



Water Daily

Unlike your vegetables and ornamental plants that may only need to be watered two or three times a week, herbs are happier with daily watering. For one, most of them have a root system that's confined to the top layers of soil. Since the topsoil dries out very fast, the plants become water-stressed and wilt. They may revive as soon as you give them water, but frequent wilting can make many herbs bitter. The stems too become woody as they develop more support tissue to withstand water stress.

Wilting cycles can cause premature aging in some herbs. They interpret these temporary drought-like conditions as the approach of unfavorable weather, and shift from their vegetative growth phase to reproductive phase. Herbs like cilantro would send out a flowering shoot from the center of their basal rosettes, effectively ending their growth. This is called bolting. Prevent this by giving the herbs a regular supply of water at least once a day, and more frequently on hot and dry days.



Fertilize Regularly But Lightly

Herbs need regular feeding to keep them in a perpetual state of growth, especially since you'll be harvesting the leaves often. However, too much feeding can induce excessive growth which dilutes the flavor. Organic fertilizers are ideal because you want to stay away from chemicals as much as possible. Fish emulsion, vermicompost and compost tea are good choices.

Herbs grown indoors can do very well with fertilizers designed for houseplants, but feed them at half strength because their root system is more delicate and they tend to suffer chemical burn. Newly potted herbs should not be fertilized for two to three weeks as their roots have to grow well before they can take up nutrients from the soil. Diluted foliar spray of compost tea can give them an initial boost.

Feed garden herbs in late winter or early spring to help them produce healthy new growth. A light top up once a month is beneficial, but only when they are actively growing.



Harvest Early And Often

Young herbs may look too small and delicate, so the natural instinct is to wait until they attain a good size before starting to harvest them for the pot. This is one common mistake novice herb gardeners often make. To get a well-branched, bushy plant that provides you with plenty of leaves in the coming months, you should start pinching the growing tip as soon as the plant has three or four sets of leaves.

A set means all of the leaves that arise from one node. Some plants may have just one leaf at every node, while mint family plants usually have a pair of opposite leaves. You may find a whorl of leaves at every node in some plants, but that doesn't matter. What you should remember, however, is to pinch the growing tip of the main stem with one or two sets of leaves just above a node. The plant will send out new branches from that node so that you will soon have many more growing tips to pinch and use.



Rejuvenate With Hard Pruning

Your herbs will need a thorough pruning every now and then to promote fuller growth. This prevents them from turning straggly and woody. For most herbs with soft, fleshy stems such as mint, oregano, bee balm, basil and tarragon, hard pruning should be done whenever they start to show signs of flowering. This shift from vegetative phase to reproductive phase will change the flavor of the herb, besides bringing its useful life to a premature end. You can safely prune them two to three times during the growing season as long as you don't take off more than 1/3 of it at a time. Also, avoid pruning too close to the cold season.

For evergreen herbs with woody stems, such as rosemary, a spring pruning just as the new growth starts, and maybe another one after flowering, should be enough. With the bulk of the leafy branches out of the way, you can easily spot any diseases or pest infestations in the bush.



Plan An Exclusive Herb Garden

If you're growing a number of herbs, starting a garden exclusively for them is a good idea. Even if you may not use up all of your produce, herb gardens are always enjoyable. I love to plant an herb garden very close to my outdoor living spaces. The aromatic oils in the herbs infuse the air with refreshing scents, and many are decorative with silvery foliage or mounding habit. A few burst with colorful blooms that attract honeybees, hummingbirds and butterflies too. Moreover, herbs are easy to grow and generally free of pests and diseases.

Choose a location easily accessible from your house, preferably where the afternoon shadow of your house creates a cooler environment that is ideal for spending summer evenings in. Prepare the herb beds with plenty of compost incorporated into the soil. Herbs lend themselves well to formal styles like old-fashioned knot gardens and French parterre, or you can plan winding walkways and a few seats to create an informal setting.



Use Herbs For Companion Planting

If space limitation does not allow the luxury of a dedicated herb garden, you can squeeze them into your vegetable beds. Most make good companion plants because they repel pests like aphids, cabbage moth and tomato worms. Some attract pollinators to the garden and help to increase the yield of your vegetable crops too. Special care should be taken to pair them up with suitable companions, however. While some herbs like oregano, tarragon, marjoram and lovage make good companions for almost all the vegetables, a few, like fennel, don't get along with any.

It may be just a happy coincidence that basil is a great companion for tomato plants, not only in the garden but in the kitchen as well. Try some of the following combinations: chives with carrots, dill and thyme with cabbage, parsley with asparagus and chervil with radishes. Avoid planting incompatible plants close to one another. For instance, sage goes well with carrots and cabbages but not with cucumbers.



Pest And Disease Control

Herbs are less susceptible to pests and diseases compared to vegetables, but problems do sometimes occur. Using chemical pesticides and antimicrobial agents is not part of organic gardening and rarely a good idea for obvious reasons.

Aphids may crowd the tender parts of the plants while whiteflies and spider mites hide under leaves. Use a strong jet of water to dislodge them as soon as you spot them. Leafhoppers, leaf miners and caterpillars may partake of your herbs, but they don't usually cause much damage other than leaving little marks or holes on the leaves. Remember that these half-eaten leaves are still far safer than the pesticide-laden varieties you may purchase from the store.

Growing herbs in unsuitable conditions is one of the reasons for many diseases. A few herbs like lemongrass and various types of mints do well in wet areas, but most other herbs need good drainage. Waterlogging can cause root rot and other fungal infections, but raised beds and containers can solve that problem.



“My passion for gardening may strike some as selfish, or merely an act of resignation in the face of overwhelming problems that beset the world. It is neither. I have found that each garden is just what Voltaire proposed in *Candide*: a microcosm of a just and beautiful society. ”

— Andrew Weil



Let's Get **Growing**

Herbs have been revered for their medicinal and culinary properties since antiquity. Growing these herbs will add tremendous value to your garden and add to your self sufficiency in a big way.

HERBS KEY



EDIBLE



MEDICINAL



CULINARY



Aloe Vera



Description and Use:

You might be aware of how effective aloe vera is at soothing a burn, but did you also know that it is a nutritional powerhouse that can be enjoyed raw or cooked? I love to put raw aloe vera meat in my smoothies and use the gel to reduce puffiness in my face. Ingesting aloe vera gel can help the body produce collagen. It is also a natural detoxifier.

Growing:

Aloe vera is a succulent plant that does best in dry conditions. Plant in cactus potting soil mixes and be sure that the pot has plenty of drainage holes. Aloe vera plants do best when grown in pots indoors. Place pot in a south or west-facing window. Fertilizer is generally not needed.





Anise



Description and Use:

Anise has many culinary and medicinal uses, with its minty, fresh, sweet flavor. Part of the mint family, it's long been used in ancient cultures as a breath freshener, sweetener and tea. In Chinese medicine, it's used for treating headaches, angina, heat stroke and fever. I like to use it by adding the dried leaves to a cheesecloth and hanging it onto the faucet of my bathtub. The water flows over it, bringing the scent of the herb out while creating a calming sensation. Both the flowers and leaves can be made into a tasty tea with a black licorice flavor, sipping to relieve congestion. It's also good in salads, or as a complement to lamb, salmon and poultry dishes.

Growing:

Anise does best grown outdoors in the garden. It requires an alkaline, well-drained soil with a pH of 6.3 to 7.0, as well as full sun. While you're growing the seeds, water them daily until plants have been established, which will be able to tolerate periods of drought.





Basil



Description and Use:

Basil is one of the most commonly used herbs for cooking, a staple in many different cuisines, including Italian. I always have some on hand, not only for culinary uses, but for medicinal purposes too. Holy basil tends to offer some of the most powerful benefits for one's health, including the ability to fight fatigue and reduce cortisol levels. This stress hormone can weaken your immune system, contribute to weight gain and even harm the ability to learn new things.

Growing:

Basil is an herb that's great for growing indoors in a smaller, globe-type container. Plant it in well-drained, nutrient-rich soil that's kept moist but never soggy. Use organic fertilizer to help maintain pH levels and place it in an area that gets at least six hours of sunlight each day. If that's not an option, fluorescent lights can be used, but the plants will need about ten hours of light daily for healthy growth.





Broadleaf Plantain



Description and Use:

You might run across a couple of different plantains, but I prefer the broadleaf plantain, which has larger and softer, edible leaves. They can be used both medicinally and in the kitchen. The edible leaves are loaded with calcium and other minerals, as well as vitamins like vitamin K. The tender leaves are great eaten raw in a salad, but if they aren't fresh, you can cook them or make a plantain tea. Sipping tea is fabulous for easing digestive ailments, including IBS and other inflammatory problems in the gastrointestinal tract.

Growing:

Broadleaf plantain is generally best grown outdoors, using natural, organic farming or no-till garden methods. Once it's started, there's no need to turn the soil, as it loosens hard, compacted soils. As it's quite hardy, it can be walked on over and over, so it's great for growing on pathways, and it can grow in a variety of soil pH and climates. After spreading the seed, simply tamp the soil with the back of a hoe, spread a little mulch, mulching around them to prevent other weeds from popping up. Then, all you have to do is pick off flower heads to prevent them from turning into seedheads, and year after year you'll have some nice greens.



Chamomile



Description and Use:

Who doesn't love chamomile tea? It's one of the most common herbal teas, frequently used to help promote better sleep and a sense of calmness. It can also help remedy digestive ailments, and contains a powerful antioxidant that can reduce the inflammation that leads to illness and dangerous disease.



Growing:

Chamomile will thrive outdoors, but it also grows well indoors in a pot. Requiring only four hours of sunlight per day, it will do well indoors as long as it has a spot by a south-facing window. The soil should be kept moist but not overly wet, watering only about once per week. Plant chamomile outdoors in the spring from either starter plants or seeds. It does best in cool conditions with partial shade, though it will grow with full sun. Once established, it requires very little care. It's drought tolerant and only needs water during times of prolonged drought.



Chives



Description and Use:

Chives can be used in many dishes, including omelettes, creamy sauces, soups, salads and garnishes. They contain a good amount of vitamin K and are a particularly good source of vitamin A, with 145 percent of the RDA in just a half-cup. They also provide flavonoids and carotenes to help reduce the risk of lung and mouth cancers, as well as offering antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antibiotic, antiviral, antifungal and antibiotic properties.

Growing:

Chives can grow just about anywhere, including indoors. Keep them in the kitchen and you'll have an easy-to-grab supply. Choose a sunny south-facing window that gets six to eight hours of full sunlight each day, rotating your containers if the chives begin to reach toward the light. Keep misted, using a water bottle to prevent low humidity, and water the plants whenever the surface of the soil is dry to the touch.



Cilantro



Description and Uses:

Cilantro is a true superfood, with countless ways to utilize it for enhancing both taste and nutrition. Frequently used in Mexican, Caribbean and Asian cooking, it's loaded with nutrients, including vitamins A, C, E and K, and minerals like magnesium, calcium, potassium and iron. I've been known to toss it into a smoothie, and into fresh guac too. I also like to use it in stir-fries, added toward the end of cooking. This helps to maintain the fresh flavor and oils that are known to ease gastric problems.

Growing:

Cilantro is easy to grow indoors. Choose a container that is at least eight inches deep and contains drainage holes at the bottom. Fill it with potting soil, an inch or two from the top and then pressure the seeds in. Water until the soil is moist, but not soggy. Cover it up using plastic wrap, securing it with rubber bands, then place it in a sunny location. Once the seeds have germinated, which usually only takes a few days, remove the plastic wrap. Water daily.



Comfrey



Description and Use:

Comfrey is a plant with slender, long leaves and black-skinned roots. It produces clusters of blue, purple and white flowers. While some make a tea from it, most experts advise against consuming it, as it can be toxic to the liver. In fact, comfrey-containing oral products have been banned in the U.S. and other countries! It's best used topically for medicinal purposes. I use it to make a poultice to help reduce inflammation and soothe pain by combining four cups of the chopped leaves and stems with a quarter cup of almond oil. I then wrap this paste up in a cotton cloth, freeze it and apply to problem areas, holding it on for 30 or more minutes to relieve pain and swelling.

Growing:

Comfrey can be grown almost anywhere, indoors or out. This hardy plant can withstand temperatures as low as 40 degrees below zero and as high as 120 degrees Fahrenheit. While it prefers soil with a pH of 6.0 to 7.0, it tends to adapt well to nearly any environment, dry or wet, in full sun or partial shade. Simply grow it, sit back and then reap the rewards.





Echinacea



Description and Use:

One of the most popular medicinal herbs there is, echinacea is well-known for its ability to fight a cold by strengthening the immune system. It also battles against some viral and bacterial invaders too. The most commonly used medicinal variety is *Echinacea purpurea*, also known as Purple Coneflower. It helps to fight infections and can be used both topically and internally for everything from acne to bronchitis.

Growing:

Echinacea is a plant best grown outdoors. It requires well-drained soil and will tolerate half shade in addition to being remarkably drought-resistant. Plus, it creates a gorgeous display of color too, particularly when planted among shorter perennials, allowing its pink, white and purple flowers to stand out. Water regularly until it's well-established. It rarely needs watering, with overwatering the bigger concern. You can grow it from seeds sown early indoors, transplanting outside after the threat of frost has gone, or sow it directly into your garden in the summer.



Feverfew



Description and Use:

Feverfew is an excellent medicinal herb for migraines, rheumatism and arthritis, thanks to its anti-inflammatory, sedative and antispasmodic properties.

Chewing one to four leaves each day can help prevent a migraine from coming on. Drinking it as a tea, made from the whole plant, is a great way to relieve the symptoms of a fever or cold, too. The dried flowers are sometimes used as a flavoring for pastries, and it imparts a deliciously aromatic if somewhat bitter taste to certain dishes.

Growing:

You can grow feverfew indoors or out. Indoors, it's best planted in small peat pots filled with damp soil. Sprinkle a few seeds into your pot and simply tap the bottom of the pot to help the seeds settle into the soil. Spray them lightly with water to keep them moist and then place the pot in a sunny window. Outdoors, the process is much the same. Sow the seeds in early spring while the ground is still cool. Sprinkle them on top, lightly tamping the soil without covering the seeds, which require sunlight to germinate. Mist with water to avoid washing the seeds away.



Ginger



Description and Use:

Ginger is one of the most beloved herbs, with a wide range of medicinal and culinary uses. The root of the plant is used for treating many digestive woes, like morning sickness, nausea, gas, IBS, diarrhea, motion sickness, colic and more. Its anti-inflammatory properties give it the ability to help ease menstrual pain, arthritis and migraine headaches. It can even battle an upper respiratory tract infection. Experts believe the chemical compounds in ginger may work not only in the intestines and stomach, but in the nervous system and brain for controlling nausea. It's great made into a tea, pickled, used in stir-fries or included in a wide range of other recipes.

Growing:

Ginger is one of the easiest herbs to grow. All you need to do is cut a fresh chunk of ginger root and place it in the soil, buds facing up. You can grow it indoors in an area that's warm but doesn't get much direct sunlight. In just a week or so, you'll see new roots and shoots growing. Pull it up and begin the process all over again, saving a chunk for replanting every time you use it.



Great Mullein



Description and Use:

Great mullein is a plant that grows very tall in its second year, with soft leaves and yellow flowers at the top that give it a unique appearance. The leaves and flowers are edible, though enjoying a cup of tea out of it is generally the preferable way to use it. An infusion of the oils from the mullein flower can be used to create drops to ease an earache. And since it's a powerful antibacterial agent, it's very effective for treating mouth and gum ulcers. The root is commonly used for relieving the pain of a toothache, with the oil potent enough to even cure an infection.

Growing:

This plant can grow up to ten feet tall (unless you purchase one of the newer cultivars that reaches only five feet), so it's best grown outdoors. It needs a lot of space, but when growing it as an herbal remedy, you'll be able to use every part of the plant at different times during its life cycle. It prefers full sun and a warm, dry location. It grows in just about any type of soil, though it does best with dry, slightly alkaline soils. Keep the soil moist, but be careful not to overwater.





Johnny Jump Up



Description and Use:

Also known as heart's ease, Johnny jump ups have dainty flowers that look like miniature pansies with their deep violet, yellow, mauve and white petals. The blossoms not only add color, but they're edible, with a mild wintergreen flavor for a tasty garnish. They're often used in desserts, soups, salads and drinks. They're great grown in a pot on your porch or patio, as well as enhancing the look of your garden.

Growing:

Johnny jump ups are fun and easy to grow. They can be grown in partial or full sun, and directly seeded into your flower garden, or seeded indoors. For spring blooms, start them in a pot or container indoors, six to eight weeks before the last frost. They tolerate a variety of soils, moist but not wet. You'll only need to water them during dry periods, about once or twice a week.



Lavender



Description and Use:

One of the most versatile herbs around, lavender is probably best known for its use in aromatherapy to provide a calm, relaxing sensation that can relieve stress and anxiety. Plus, it's also a great culinary herb. In particular, English lavender is a delight, with its sweet, floral flavor and lemon and citrus notes. It's actually a member of the mint family, close to thyme, sage and rosemary. The flowers add a beautiful color to salads, and it can also make a great alternative to rosemary in bread recipes. Applied topically, it can be used to soothe a skin rash, the pain and itch of an insect bite, minor burns and acne.

Growing:

You can grow lavender indoors or out, though the plants do best outdoors. Most indoor-grown lavender won't display ideal growth, leaf color or colorful blooms due to the lack of light, with few indoor settings offering a sufficient amount. The English type is not only the sweetest and most widely grown, it also has a good tolerance for winter moisture and humidity. Make sure plants get at least six hours of full sun each day, water very little and grow them in a well-drained area.



Lemon Balm



Description and Use:

One of my favorite herbs, lemon balm, has been used by folks since the Middle Ages to help reduce anxiety, improve sleep, heal wounds and even promote longevity. It can also help to ease a cold and reduce a fever by inducing sweating. Despite being a member of the mint family, it has a wonderful lemon scent rather than a minty flavor, but it's not as tart or intense like lemons. Its lighter flavor makes it excellent in a variety of culinary dishes. As a bonus, this plant is a favorite for bees, helping to support the bee population.

Growing:

While it can be done, most experts advise against growing lemon balm indoors as the plant won't ever be as hardy or strong as its outdoor counterparts. If you do it anyway, it will need as much direct light as possible, at least six hours of strong sunlight each day. It also likes a steady supply of water, but with good drainage. Outdoors, it can be grown in just about any climate in an area that gets lots of sun, though some shade during the day is okay. Use rich, moist, well-drained soil and a little organic fertilizer too.



Marigold



Description and Use:

You've probably seen lots of bright orange-colored marigolds in gardens and flower pots, but many species of marigold flowers offer lots of impressive health benefits too. Also known as calendula, they can be utilized for their antifungal, anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic compounds. The petals lend skin-soothing properties that can relieve the pain and sting of an insect bite, soothe muscular pain, address the eye itchiness and inflammation caused by conjunctivitis, and help to battle a fungal infection, including candida and athlete's foot. The petals are mild but flavorful, adding color to a variety of dishes.

Growing:

Marigolds aren't suitable for indoor growing, unless you have a greenhouse, but you can plant them indoors to get a head start on the growing season about four to six weeks before the last expected frost. They thrive in hot, dry conditions, requiring full sun. Though they can be grown in just about any soil, they do best in well-drained, moderately fertile soil. Once planted, they need very little care. Only give them water if it's been very dry for more than a couple of weeks.



Meadowsweet



Description and Use:

Although meadowsweet is edible, it's most often recognized for its medicinal properties, with the ability to help with many ailments, mainly due to the salicylic acid content in its flower head. In particular, it's frequently used to treat bronchitis, colds, stomach upset, heartburn and joint disorders. The young leaves are edible and often added to soups or utilized to make tea.

Growing:

Meadowsweet has feathery flowering blooms and thrives outdoors as long as you pay attention to its watering needs. Grow it in a partially shady area with well-drained soil that has good water retention. Incorporate a couple of inches of peat moss or compost when you plant it, as it requires moist soil. Water it regularly during the growing season. If you notice the leaves turning brown, water more often and snip off any dead leaves.



Motherwort



Description and Use:

The name “motherwort” reflects its long history for easing anxiety, tension and cramps in new and expecting mothers. It also provides support to the circulatory system. In Germany, it’s been approved for use in nervous conditions and to treat hypothyroidism. The plant blossoms in late summer, with the tall stalks, flowers and leaves harvested for use in herbal medicine. They can be made into a tea or tincture, and have a delightfully cooling taste. The fresh or dried flowers can be used as a flavoring in soups, particularly lentil or split pea.

Growing:

Motherwort is an herb that is often found growing wild. In the mint family, it spreads just as wildly. While it’s very forgiving, it’s best grown outdoors, sown directly into your garden. It grows well in all light conditions and in most soils. As it self-seeds like crazy, it’s important not to let it reseed unless you want it to take over an entire area. You can limit the chances of this occurring by cutting back to three to five inches after flowering, before the seeds mature.



Parsley



Description and Use:

Parsley is one of the most well-known herbs, easy to incorporate in many dishes, adding flavor and nutrients to salads, pasta dishes, soups, stews, stir-fries and much more. It's an excellent source of vitamins C and K, as well as a good source of folate, iron and vitamin A. It also provides potent anti-inflammatory properties that can help treat a wide range of disease, including diabetes, gastrointestinal disorders, hypertension, heart disease and more.

Growing:

Parsley is easy to grow indoors or out. The important thing to remember is that when starting from seeds, you'll need to soak the seeds in warm water first to crack the seed coat. Parsley does best in a sunny, south-facing window where it will get six to eight hours of direct sunlight each day. Sprinkle a few seeds onto the surface of the soil and then cover them up with another quarter-inch of soil. Water regularly, keeping the soil moist to the touch but never soggy.



Passionflower



Description and Use:

Passionflower is a beautiful perennial vine that can grow up to 30 feet. It grows quickly, producing edible light green fruit with a tart apricot flavor, or it can be made into a tasty drink that has the flavor of passionfruit. It was commonly used in the 19th century for treating extreme anxiety. It has the ability to slow breathing, which helps to lower the pulse and decrease blood pressure, things that are common during a panic attack. Today, it's used for insomnia as well as stomach upset related to nerves or anxiety, general anxiety disorder and even easing narcotic drug withdrawal symptoms. You can eat the fruit when they readily fall off, and also eat the leaves raw in a salad.

Growing:

Passionflower is a tropical vine that can easily be grown indoors to create a tropical look inside your home. It prefers temperatures that remain a steady 55 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit, but can tolerate slightly cooler temperatures too. It likes lots of light, but keep it out of direct sun. Water it regularly while it's growing, providing adequate drainage.



Peppermint



Description and Use:

Peppermint is one of the world's most popular and well-known herbs. It's been used for thousands of years and was even mentioned in the world's oldest surviving medical text, the Ebers Papyrus, which is believed to date back to the 16th century BCE. It's famous for easing digestive woes, including everything from nausea and indigestion to cramps and diarrhea. The leaves can be made into a tea, or used in many dishes to add a zesty taste. It's an especially good complement for meats like lamb and poultry too.

Growing:

Peppermint is actually best grown in containers due to its invasive nature, making it ideal for growing indoors or in small outdoor spaces like a patio or balcony. It does best in moist, well-drained soil and partial sun. Avoid putting it in a place where it gets lots of full, direct sun. For a lengthy harvest, keep the flowers pinched back. To avoid weakening, wait until the plant is ten to 12 inches high before picking the leaves. They tend to be at their best just prior to flowering.



Rosemary



Description and Use:

This perennial woody herb is especially popular for culinary use as one of the most common herbs found in spice racks. It adds flavor and aroma to everything from roasts and stews to soups and sauces. But it doesn't only offer a fabulous taste, it provides a wealth of health benefits too. For centuries it's been used medicinally for improving memory, and it can also help boost energy levels and concentration as it brings more oxygen to the brain.

Growing:

Growing rosemary indoors can be tricky — even experienced gardeners can end up with dead plants despite their best efforts. Still, it is possible to do as long as your plants can get plenty of sunlight, proper watering and a room with good air circulation. Plant the seeds in a container that has holes for drainage, and then add soil made up of two parts potting soil and one part coarse sand. Add a teaspoon of agricultural lime for every five inches of pot and then place your container in an area that gets at least six hours of direct sunlight every day. Water it when the soil is dry to the touch, but avoid letting it dry out completely.



Sage



Description and Use:

Sage is a perennial evergreen shrub that's very easy to plant and even easier to care for once established. When made into a tea it's great for relieving digestive ailments like bloating and gas, and it may also help improve one's memory, mood and attention span. Sage is also an outstanding source of fiber, vitamin A, folate, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese and B vitamins. Of course, it's popular for culinary use too, often added to home-baked breads, pastas, salads, soups and sauces. It adds a wonderful fragrant earthiness to desserts too.

Growing:

Sage needs lots of sun, so if you grow it indoors, be sure to place it in a sunny windowsill. It provides the tastiest leaves when it gets lots of sunlight. Choose well-drained, loamy, sandy soil with a pH of 6.0 to 7.0 and wait until the soil dries out before giving it a thorough watering.



Southern Ginseng



Description and Use:

Southern ginseng, also known as jiaogulan, is a plant that grows wild in parts of Asia, primarily in south-central China. It's used in a similar way as ginseng, and has the ability to calm or energize the system, depending on the body's particular needs. In addition, it's known to increase longevity. In fact, it's been nicknamed the "herb of mortality." As it contains saponins, it has the ability to positively affect blood pressure, cholesterol levels, the immune system, blood sugar levels and more. Its gypenosides have also been used in cancer treatment and hepatitis. It's best used when made into a tea, and generally not utilized for culinary purposes.

Growing:

This vine plant can grow to over 20 feet in length, which means it has the potential to be an invasive species, but it's easy to grow inside or out. It prefers to be sheltered in partial shade, or grown indoors on a bright windowsill that faces east or west. Either way, use rich, well-drained soil and keep it moist but not waterlogged.



Stinging Nettles



Description and Use:

Stinging nettle probably doesn't sound like a plant you'd want to have growing, as the tiny, acid-filled nettles cause a painful rash. Fortunately, the needles fall off when boiling it. And by consuming it, you'll be getting magnesium, potassium, iodine and phosphorus, along with a wide range of medicinal benefits. It has the power to help strengthen the immune system, regulate menstruation, improve energy and circulation, protect the kidneys, reduce inflammation, lower blood pressure and improve respiratory disorders. Some cultures make nettle soup, or add it to cheeses, though stinging nettle leaves are most commonly used to brew a tea. The top leaves of the plant, picked early in the season, are one of the best cooked greens. In fact, I've never tasted a cooked green I like better.

Growing:

Stinging nettles are best grown from seeds started indoors, and then grown outdoors in containers or directly in your garden. They're fast growing and can reach up to four or five feet tall. Plant one to three seeds in each peat pot that's been filled with potting soil, then lightly cover them with about a quarter inch of soil. Keep them moist and in about two weeks they should germinate. Place them in an area of your garden away from other herbs, or in individual containers in rich, moist soil. Keep them moist with regular watering, but avoid excessive watering.



St. John's Wort



Description and Use:

St. John's wort is most famous for its use as a natural antidepressant, and it's also been utilized for its anti-inflammatory properties for more than 2,000 years. It contains dozens of biologically active compounds, though hyperforin and hypericin offer the most potent medicinal activity in this herb. In addition to treating depression, it can improve one's mood, relieve PMS symptoms, fight inflammatory conditions like skin rashes, and even reduce the risk of cancer. When growing your own, it's best utilized by making it into a tea.

Growing:

Growing St. John's wort is fairly easy, though it's best done outdoors in a location that gets bright morning sunlight and partial shade in the hottest part of the afternoon. Too much shade will reduce the number of flowers it produces, but too much sun can cause leaf scorch. To prevent it from smothering other plants, you may want to grow it in containers. Use nutrient-rich soil and add a layer of mulch around the base to keep moisture in. Usually just a couple of inches of water a week is all these plants need to thrive.



Tarragon



Description and Use:

Tarragon is famously used in classic French cuisine for chicken, fish and vegetable dishes as well as in bearnaise sauce. As the leaves are incredibly tender, they're also great mixed into a salad, or sprinkled over a dish similar to parsley. This herb is a great source of minerals like calcium, zinc, magnesium and iron as well as being rich in vitamins A, B-6 and C. It also offers antioxidants that help battle excess free radicals that can lead to cellular damage and a host of diseases. Tarragon is also known to support heart health and lower blood sugar levels naturally.

Growing:

Tarragon is best grown outdoors in containers. It can grow two to three feet tall and prefers moderate sun with a little shade during the hottest part of the day. Use a rich, loamy soil that holds moisture but drains well. Mulching around it can help keep it moist.



Thyme



Description and Use:

Thyme is another common herb used in cooking. It's another one of my favorites, with endless ways to utilize it in everything from marinades and sauces to salad dressing. The herb also offers a host of medicinal benefits, thanks to its antibacterial and antifungal properties. Centuries ago, it was used for embalming and to protect one from the Black Death. The flowers, leaves and oil of thyme have been found to lower high blood pressure and treat many other conditions, from a sore throat, cough and bronchitis to arthritis, diarrhea and colic.

Growing:

Thyme can be grown indoors, thriving in pots that are as small as just four to six inches. It prefers light, fast-draining soil, along with full sun; east-facing window sills are generally a good spot for success. Water thyme regularly, but be careful not to overwater. It's naturally drought-resistant and does best when the soil is allowed to become slightly dry in between waterings.



Wild Bergamot



Description and Use:

Also known as bee balm, wild bergamot is an edible and medicinal herb. All parts growing above ground are edible and used for flavoring in cooked dishes. The pretty lilac or lavender-colored flowers make a fabulous edible garnish in salads, while the fresh or dried leaves can be brewed into a medicinal, aromatic tea. It's excellent for treating colds, headaches, gastric distress, sore throats, nausea, insomnia and menstrual pain.

Growing:

Wild bergamot does best when grown outdoors in a place that gets lots of sun but stays somewhat sheltered by shade during the hottest parts of the day. While it's tolerant of many soil types, it does best with rich, loamy, fertile soil that's drier and more alkaline. Start the plant indoors, six to eight weeks before the final average frost of the season. Sow seeds about a quarter inch deep, and transplant them outdoors after the final threat of spring frost.



Preserve Excess Herbs

When you grow a large number of herbs, you're sure to have more than you can use at once. You can dry herbs like oregano, sage, rosemary, thyme and tarragon for making herb mixes for pizzas, roasts and pies, but don't bother drying cilantro. Some herbs just don't dry well. In some cases, dried herb tastes entirely different than fresh, but not necessarily in a bad way. You can try freezing some herbs to preserve their fresh flavor as much as possible.

Chop up the leaves and freeze them in water, oil or melted butter in ice trays; you can toss in a cube or two while making sauces. Other options include preserving them in olive oil or vinegar for salad dressings. Herbs make good gifts for friends and neighbors who love cooking and pickling, and some are great used in potpourri.

Medicinal herbs can be used fresh to make infusions with oil or glycerin, or to create tinctures with alcohol. Dried leaves, flowers and even roots can be stored in airtight containers for making herbal tea mixes, cosmetics and healing salves later. The options are endless. Enjoy!



“Let us not forget that the cultivation of the earth is the most important labor of man. When tillage begins, other arts will follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of civilization.”

– Daniel Webster

