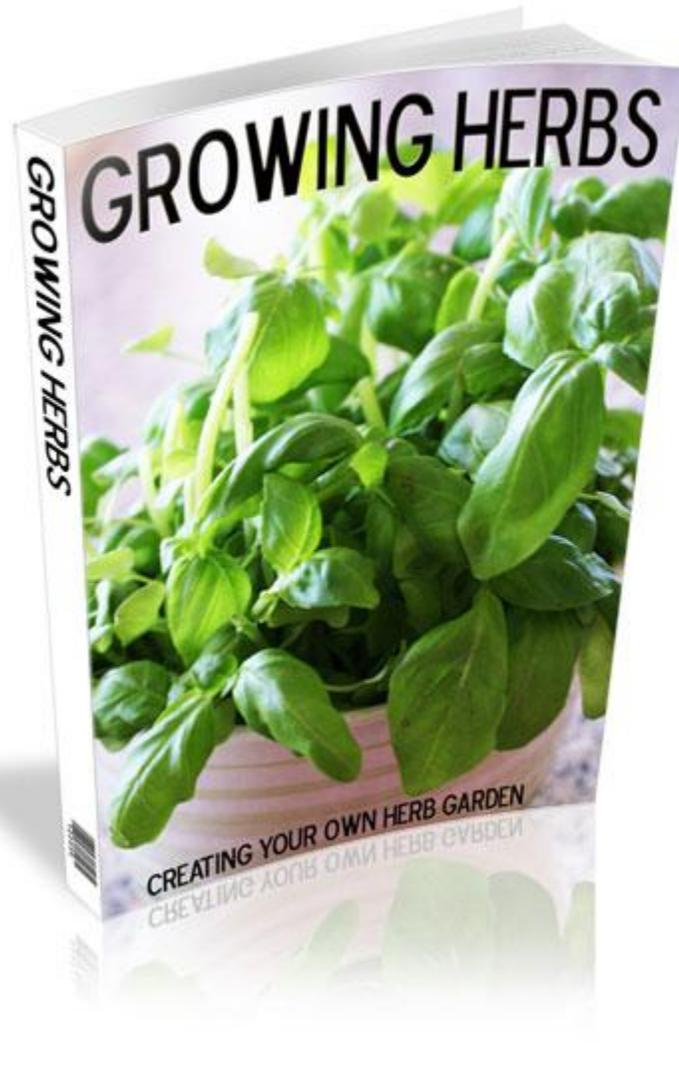


Growing Your Own Herbs



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Growing Your Own Herbs

If you're not the type of person that wants to spend their time managing an elaborate fruit or vegetable garden, you might consider planting and maintaining an herb garden. While the product might not seem as significant, you'll still enjoy the constant availability of fresh, delicious herbs to flavor your meals with.

First you'll want to choose the herbs that you'll plant. You might have a hard time doing this because of the huge scope of herbs available. But the best way to choose is to do what I did; just look at what you have in your kitchen. By planting your own collection of these herbs, you can save money on buying them from the grocery store while having the added benefit of freshness. Some of the herbs you might start with include rosemary, sage, basil, dill, mint, chives, and parsley among others.

When choosing an area to put your herb garden, you should remember that the soil should have extremely good drainage. If the dirt gets watered and stays completely saturated, you have no chance of ever growing a healthy plant. One of the best ways to fix the drainage problem is to dig a foot deep in the soil, and put a layer of crushed rocks down before replacing all the soil. This will allow all that water to escape, thus saving your plants.

When you are ready to begin planting herbs, you might be tempted to buy the more expensive plants from the store. However, with herbs it is much easier to grow them from seed than it is with other plants. Therefore you can save a bundle of money by sticking with seed packets. Some herbs grow at a dangerously fast rate. For example, if you plant a mint plant in an open space then it will take over your entire garden in a matter of days. The best way to prevent this problem is to plant the more aggressive plants in pots (with holes in the bottom to allow drainage, of course).

When it comes time to harvest the herbs you have labored so hard over, it can be fatal to your plant to take off too much. If your plant isn't well established, it isn't healthy to take any leaves at all, even if it looks like it's not using them. You should wait until your plant has been well established for at least several months

before taking off any leaves. This wait will definitely be worth it, because by growing unabated your plant will produce healthily for years to come. Once you've harvested your delicious home grown herbs, you'll want to use them in cooking. Why else would you have grown them? Well first the process begins with drying them out. This is easily achieved by placing them on a cookie sheet and baking them 170 degrees Fahrenheit for 2 to 4 hours. After they're sufficiently dried to be used in cooking, you can consult the nearest cookbook for instructions on using them to effectively flavor a dish.

If you want to store your herbs for later usage, you should keep them in a plastic or glass container. Paper or cardboard will not work, because it will absorb the taste of the herbs. During the first few days of storage, you should regularly check the container and see if any moisture has accumulated. If it has, you must remove all the herbs and re-dry them. If moisture is left from the first drying process, it will encourage mildew while you store your herbs. Nobody likes mildew.

So if you enjoy herbs or gardening, or both, then you should probably consider setting up an herb garden. It might require a little bit of work at first to set it up for optimal drainage, and pick what herbs you want to grow. But after the initial hassle, it's just a matter of harvesting and drying all your favorite herbs.

Getting Started With Herb Growing

Herbs have been around since time immemorial. Ever since, herbs have served different kinds of purposes. Herbs have been used to treat illness and also in cooking. They were even believed to have magical charms. Do you want to have your own herb garden? Here are a few ideas on how to establish an herb garden.

Plan you garden.

Consider the herbs you want to plant. Think about their types. Would you like annuals, biennials or perennials?

How much space will they occupy in your garden? If you want, you can purchase a book that can give you the right information on what specific plants you are planning to grow.

List or draw your garden on paper first. Separate the annuals from the perennials so when the time comes that you have to pull out the annuals, you won't be disturbing the perennials. Perennials can be planted on the edge of your garden so when it is time to till your garden; you won't have a hard time.

Another thing to remember is that you have to plant the tall ones at the back and the shorter ones in front. Also, provide your plants with enough space to grow. Proper position shall help you in this area.

Some Design Ideas

You can consider having a square herb bed. You can have your square bed divided into four by two paths crossing at mid point measuring 3 feet. You can border it with stone or brick. A wooden ladder may also do the trick. You can lay it down on your garden and plant your herbs between its rungs. You can also choose to have a wagon wheel bed. Planting here is like planting with the wooden ladders. Plant your herbs in between the wagon wheel's wedges.

Get Your Plants Growing

Of course, different plants have different needs. This is the reason why you have to determine the herbs you want to plant in the planning stage. This can more or less help you find out how you should care for your plants. With starting seeds, remember its germination and soil temperature rules. If you see the seedlings sprouting, check the plants' air circulation, humidity and sunlight. When you see some leaves appear, allow proper spacing.

One of the plants that are easy to grow are herbs. You just have to provide them with an effective drainage, sunlight, enough humidity or moisture and fertile soil. Even with just minimally meeting these requirements they will be bound produce a good harvest.

One of the most appealing things anyone will learn about herb gardening is how relaxing and simple growing herbs can be. Discovering all the wonderful, various herbs and what they do is a captivating pastime, and can be quite beneficial. You can use herbs for cooking, as medicinal aids such as topical dressings or healthy teas, or simply for decorative plants in the garden.

There are so many herb plants to choose from, it can be a bit daunting to the beginning herb gardener. A good source of information that you probably have is your cookbook, which often devotes a chapter or two to the uses of different herbs as flavorings and accents.

Planting a Basic Herb Garden

Get acquainted with herb gardening by growing herbs you think you'll use, plus throw in one or two that sound interesting to you. Herb gardens can range in size from small containers to vast outdoor gardens.

To best learn herb gardening, start simple with a small, sunny plot, or use a clay pot filled with potting soil.

The Two Big Needs that herbs have are:

- lots of sun, and
- well-drained soil.

Most herbs have a preference of full or partial sun, and the seed package or nursery will have this information clearly stated. Most herbs will not do well in very wet soil, and watering about every 2-3 days is usually sufficient. Raised garden beds are a good fit for herb gardens. They have excellent drainage and can be easily arranged for proper sunlight.

When planting herb seeds, cover them lightly with soil, and don't plant the seeds too deep. A good rule of thumb with herb gardening is "the smaller the seed, the shallower you sow." If you are using young herb plants already started in growing trays, simply transplant them into your pots or garden bed. Sometimes the plants in the trays are dry; if so, water them first before planting them.

Finally, remember that annual herbs (herb plants which only grow for one season and then die) and perennial herbs (herb plants which will return the following year) do best when planted separately. This avoids disrupting the perennial plants' roots when it is time to dig out the dead annuals. It also prevents leaving dead root pieces behind which can contribute to fungus growth.

Grow Fresh Herbs for Cooking

Cooking with fresh herbs from your garden is a wonderful experience. To get started, here are gardening tips for two well-known herbs that are great for beginning herb gardeners.

Sweet Basil -- Sweet basil leaves are good in salads, and are a main flavoring ingredient in tomato dishes such as spaghetti and marinara sauce. In the northern climates, basil is usually grown as an annual plant. In milder climates, sweet basil will return each year on its own, and therefore is considered a perennial plant.

The sweet basil herb is a pleasure to grow because it thrives in average soil, and likes sun or partial shade. Sow the seeds after danger of frost is over, or start

them indoors about eight weeks before growing season and then transplant them outside. You can also purchase ready-to-grow starter plants from nurseries and through catalogs.

It's easy to promote the bushiness of the basil plant leaves by pinching and clipping the herb throughout the summer. Use the leaves fresh during the summer growth months, and in the fall, dry the leaves and store them for use during the winter.

Garlic -- Garlic is full of minerals and nutrients, and is known to have great medicinal properties. It is a staple in every chef's kitchen for cooking dishes from chicken and pasta to seafood and vegetables. We've all seen garlic bulbs at the grocery store... but did you know that one simple garlic bulb has enough cloves to begin a garden full of garlic plants? Here's what you do:

When spring arrives and the weather has begun to turn warm, prepare a small garden bed in a sunny spot. Take the cloves and place them, pointy side up, in the soil. Plant them in clusters, or rows, and put a light layer of topsoil over them with some compost mixed in. When fall arrives, lift the garlic bulbs out of their bed.

Dry the garlic by slicing the bulbs into thin slices and placing them on a rack at room temperature. You can also store the bulbs by braiding the stalks and hanging the garlic in a dark, cool space. You may also freeze the entire garlic bulb!

Learn about herb gardening with these herbs, and then begin to branch out with more. In the meantime, you'll add wonderful flavors to your recipes, and mouthwatering aromas in the kitchen!

Growing Basil - The King of Herbs

One of the most popular herbs is *Ocimum basilicum* commonly called sweet basil. Often called the 'king of herbs,' basil can be grown indoors or out. Sweet basil has inch-long, oval-pointed, dark green leaves and a clove-pepperish odour and taste. Sweet basil makes a handsome, bushy small plant, growing to a foot or more indoors. A purple-leafed variety, 'Dark Opal' is decorative, makes a lovely houseplant, and is equally useful in cookery. Do not let basil bloom, or it will go to seed. Instead, pinch out the plant tops and they will grow into compact little bushes.

Basil is an annual and grows 12 – 24 inches (30 – 60 cm) as the height varies according to the variety. Cultivation requirements for growing basil: full sun; light, well-drained, nutrient rich, slightly acidic soil; frequent watering (don't waterlog); will not tolerate cold; pinch off flower stalks for a longer season of leaf production.

Basil can be easily started from seed or can be brought indoors at the end of the growing season. If you are bringing basil indoors, choose the most robust plants. Before the first frost, dig them out of the garden and pot them up in fresh potting soil. Basil can also be grown in pots outdoors and treated the same way when bringing them in for winter. Check for insects and if there is an infestation, spray with a soap and water spray. Gradually reverse the hardening off process by keeping the pots out of direct sunlight for about a week. The plants will become acclimatised to the lower light conditions they will experience indoors. Bring them inside and provide the conditions they need to continue growing.

Basil requires at least five hours of sunlight a day to stay healthy and flavourful. If you are growing basil on the windowsill, turn regularly to ensure every side receives light. Don't let basil leaves touch the cold glass. Basil grows even better under fluorescent lights in the winter. Hang the lights 6 inches (15 cm) from plants and leave lights on for 14 hours a day.

There are many cultivars of basil. Two that are particularly popular are: *O. basilicum* 'Dark Opal'- only herb to win the All American Award of Excellence – can be used the same as sweet basil; *O. basilicum* 'Citriodorum'- strong lemon scent – nice for tea and with chicken and fish.

In the garden, basil can be planted with tomatoes as it helps to overcome both insects and disease. Basil also repels flies and mosquitoes. In the kitchen, use basil in tomato dishes (both raw and cooked), pesto, sauces, salad dressings, soups, fish dishes, mushroom dishes, egg and rice dishes, mixed with other herbs, omelettes, pasta dishes, vegetables such as carrots, eggplant, cabbage, squash, and zucchini. Use fresh leaves in salads and add fresh leaves to vinegar and extra virgin olive oil. Basil can be used fresh, frozen, or dried. Use basil with discretion, as it is one of the few herbs that increase in flavour when heated.

Growing Chives

Known as common garden chives, *Allium schoenoprasum*, can be grown indoors and out. Chives are rich in vitamins A and C, potassium, and calcium. They are grown for the flavor of their leaves, which is reminiscent of onion, although much milder. Both the stems and light purple flowers are used in cooking and the snipped leaves are an addition to many dishes. Chives lose their flavor with long cooking so it is best to add them to dishes at the last minute. For chopping stems, a pair of scissors is the best tool.

Chives can be frozen or dried. They are less flavorful when dried rather than frozen, so they are best used when fresh and snipped, or snipped and frozen. In both cases sort them carefully, removing any yellowing leaves and shoots, and keep only the plump green ones. It is possible to place chives in non-iodized salt, keep them there for several weeks, remove the leaves, and then bottle the 'chive salt' for use in flavoring.

Chives are a perennial in the garden and grow approximately 12 inches (30 cm) tall. They are extremely easy to grow, are drought tolerant, rarely suffer from disease or pest problems, and don't require fertilizer. Cultivation requirements for growing chives: full sun, will tolerate light shade; grow best in well-drained, organic, fertile soil; keep soil moist – use mulch, and water during periods of drought. Chives tend to get overcrowded so dig and divide every three to four years.

Chives are easily grown from seed or can be brought indoors at the end of the growing season. If you are bringing chives indoors, divide a clump, and pot up in good houseplant soil. Leave your chive plant outdoors for a month or so after the first frost to provide a short period of dormancy. Bring them indoors and provide the requirements needed for them to start growing again. To harvest, snip leaves 2 inches (5cm) from the base of the plant. Cut flower stalks off at the soil line once they have finished blooming. This prevents the plant from forming seed and keeps it more productive.

Chives require at least five to eight hours of sunlight a day. Grow them on a southern or eastern exposure to the light. If you are growing them on a windowsill, turn regularly to ensure every side receives light. If you are unable to provide this amount of light, they also grow well under fluorescent lights. Hang lights 6 inches above the plants and leave lights on for 14 hours per day.

In the garden, plant chives with carrots. They are good companion plantings for tomatoes and fruit trees. Chives or garlic planted between rows of peas or lettuce control pests and are reported to control the incidence of aphids when planted between roses. In the kitchen, use chives in omelets, scrambled eggs, casseroles, rice, dips, gravies, butter, meat, and seafood. Chives can be added to soft cheese, salads, sandwiches, sour cream, vinegar, and baked potatoes. Chive blossoms can be used for garnishing and are particularly attractive in salads. Chive stems can be used for tying up little bundles of vegetables for appetizers.

Growing Dill - The Most Important Culinary Herb

The ancient herb, *Anethum graveolens* or Fernleaf dill as it is commonly known, was mentioned some 5,000 years ago in early Egyptian writings. It is the most important culinary herb in Scandinavia, as popular as parsley is in other parts of the world. The word 'dill' stems from the Old Norse word *dilla*, meaning "to lull," and can be grown indoors and out. The feathery leaves make dill a pretty foliage plant, which is lovely as a green foil for the flowers in your garden. The fragrance of dill on fingers evokes a 'comfort smell' for many people as the leaves smell of homemade dill pickles. Old-fashioned dill water or gripe water as it is commonly known (made by infusing crushed dill seeds in hot water), is still used as a remedy for indigestion in adults as well as children.

Dill is an annual but self-seeds so once planted you will have it forever in your garden as long as you allow some of the plants to go to seed. Dill has yellow flowers and grows 1 – 4 ft. (30 – 120 cm) tall outdoors. In pots indoors, dill will be less tall. Grow dill from seed and when thinning, use the seedlings you pull up, as they are tender and delicious. Dried dill leaves are known as 'dill weed.' If you need dill seed for your fall pickles, plant some dill in mid-July to ensure you have ripening seed.

Cultivation requirements: grows best in deep, well-drained, fertile, sandy loam, likes compost or manure. Dill must be grown in full sun and watered during dry periods. Dill is easily grown from seed and grows well indoors if grown under fluorescent lights. Hang the lights 6 inches (15 cm) from plants and leave on for 14 hours a day. Dill does not transplant well and it needs a deep pot for its long taproots. Pinch out the tops to prevent flowering and seed setting to keep plants growing longer.

In the garden, dill can be planted with cabbages but not near carrots. In the kitchen, use dill for pickles, cabbage, turnips, cauliflower, in butter on fried or grilled fish, sour cream, meats, stews, cream cheese, dips. Use fresh with green beans, potato dishes, cheese, soups, salads, seafood, sauces, and snipped on vegetable dishes.

Sprinkle young dill on broiling lamb, pork chops, or steaks during the last 5 minutes of cooking. Seeds can be sprinkled on toast or crackers with salmon that has been mixed with mayonnaise. Seeds and leaves can be used in fish sauces. Zucchini can be sliced thin and sautéed in olive oil and fresh dill leaves for a nice side dish.

Fresh dill can be kept in the fridge for a few days by submersing the stems in a glass of water. Cover loosely with a plastic bag and make sure the leaves are above the water. Fresh leaves can be frozen in re-seal-able bags and used in dishes. Seeds can be stored in a closed container and used as needed. You can eat the leaves, seed heads, and seeds. Use seeds if cooking for a long time and dill weed if adding at the last minute. Dill can be dried or frozen.

Growing Marjoram - The Herb of Happiness

Called the “herb of happiness,” *Origanum majorana*, commonly known as sweet marjoram or knotted marjoram, is an herbal symbol of peace and well-being. Marjoram is grown as an annual in the colder parts of the world but is perennial in warmer regions. To keep it growing as a perennial, bring it indoors for the winter. Marjoram may be grown as a houseplant and as it has a tendency to trail when grown indoors, it makes a nice hanging basket. Marjoram has small, grey-green, oval-shaped leaves that are velvety to the touch. Tiny white or pink flowers, reddish stems, and the grey-green color of the leaves make marjoram an attractive border plant.

Marjoram grows 10 – 24 inches (25 – 60 cm) tall. Cultivation requirements: does best in full sun (will tolerate slight shade); well-drained soil; no fertilizer; water soil sparingly but do not let dry out; pinch back the tips or harvest sprigs to use in cooking to keep it bushy and productive.

Marjoram is easily grown from seed or cuttings. For spring planting, start seed indoors 6 – 8 weeks before your last frost date. Keep the soil moist during germination. After germination, move the seedlings into a sunny position, and transplant into the garden after all danger of frost has passed. If you are bringing marjoram plants in-doors for over-wintering, pot up in fresh potting soil. Check for critters and if your plants are infected, spray with a soap and water spray.

Marjoram requires at least 5 hours of sunlight a day. If you are growing marjoram on a windowsill, turn frequently to ensure all sides receive light. Marjoram can be grown under fluorescent lights. Hang the lights 6 inches (15 cm) from the plants and leave on for 14 hours a day.

In the garden, marjoram entices bees and butterflies for maximum nectar production and pollination. It is a good companion plant for all vegetables especially beets, eggplant, pumpkin, onions, and zucchini as it aids in their growth and fights off insects. Grow marjoram in pots in the garden as well as in the soil. In the kitchen, use in tomato dishes, onions, dairy, eggs, potato salad, soups, mushrooms, brussel sprouts, oil dressings for salads, carrots, and cauliflower. Fresh leaves and young shoots can be added to salads. It is a major ingredient,

usually dried, in sausages, poultry seasonings, Italian recipes, or stuffing's. Sprinkle fresh or dried marjoram on pizza. Sprinkle finely chopped fresh leaves on meat or fish before roasting, grilling, or baking. A tea can be made with marjoram to treat colds, headaches, and stomach upsets. Add 3 teaspoons (15 mL) fresh marjoram to 1 cup (250 mL) boiling water. Let steep, then drink slowly. Use marjoram sparingly as it is deceptively potent. Add during the last 10 minutes of cooking.

Marjoram will keep several days in the refrigerator. The leaves can be harvested as soon as the plant starts blooming. The leaves dry easily and can also be frozen. Many cooks prefer marjoram rather than oregano (closely related), as marjoram is much less pungent. To make potpourri, dry leaves whole and then crush to release the scent.

Growing Mint - The Herb of Hospitality

The *Mentha* species or mints as they are commonly called include many varieties that flavour everything from appetizers to desserts. The best-known species in North America are peppermint (*M. x piperita*) and spearmint (*M. spicata*), which are highly valued for commercial use. Mint symbolizes “hospitality” and can be grown in pots and containers indoors and out. In the garden, mint should be grown with a barrier around the roots, as it can be extremely invasive. Most mints do not come true from seed so it is best to purchase plants from a nursery or garden centre. Fresh mints are a source of Vitamin C and pro-vitamin A.

Peppermint and spearmint are perennials growing 12 – 36 inches (30 – 90 cm) tall although some mints are ground hugging. Produced at the end of square stems, terminal spikes of dainty lilac, purple, pink, or white flowers usually bloom in mid-to-late summer. Cultivation requirements for growing mint: grows best in moist, deep, loosely textured sandy soil; full sun but will do well in partial shade; keep well watered; pinch off flowers to promote bushy growth; and if growing indoors, fertilize with an organic fertilizer at half-strength every 3 or 4 weeks. Where winters are harsh, mulch with straw or leaves to protect your plants.

Mints have creeping roots that require sufficient room to develop. When establishing indoor plants, pot up in good houseplant soil and sufficiently large containers to accommodate their root system. To bring indoors for the winter, check for insects, and spray with soap and water if necessary. To harvest and prevent indoor plants from getting scraggly, keep the stems cut back to 5 inches (13 cm). This will also keep the plants from blooming and ensure tastier leaves.

Indoor mints require at least 5 hours of strong sunlight daily. Grow them on a southern or eastern exposure. If you are growing them on a windowsill, rotate regularly to ensure each side receives equal amounts of light. Better yet, grow them under fluorescent lights hung 6 inches (15 cm) above the plants and leave on for 14 hours a day.

In the garden, mint is a good companion to cabbage and tomatoes. Mint deters cabbageworms and spearmint may help keep aphids off nearby plants. Mints attract bees so planting them near fruit trees will improve pollination and increase yields. Add fresh mint leaves to water in the birdbath to keep the water attractive for birds. In the kitchen, use mint with roast lamb or fish, butter, salads, cheese, fruits, fruit salads, jellies, soups, sauces, plain meats, poultry, stews, sweet dishes, teas, bean and lentil dishes. Add fresh sprigs to cooking water of peas, carrots, fresh beets, new potatoes, and in vinegar. Mint flowers can be used in salads as well as garnishes for desserts.

In Middle Eastern dishes, mint is used for cheese pastry fillings, yoghurt dressings, and stuffing's for vegetables such as bell peppers, tomatoes, and eggplant. Mint tea is useful for soothing upset stomachs. To brew a cup, use 1 teaspoon (5 mL) dried leaves or 3 teaspoons (15 mL) crushed fresh leaves in 1 cup (250 mL) of boiling water. Steep to taste. Mint can be dried or freeze leaves in butter, oil, or ice cubes.

Growing Mustard - The Greatest Among The Herbs

Mustard plants have been used for thousands of years for their pungent flavour in condiments, spicy greens for side dishes and salads, and in traditional folk medicine and Chinese herbal medicine to treat a variety of ailments. The name mustard comes from the Latin *mustum ardens*, or “burning must.” It was so named because as the seeds were pounded with unfermented grape juice, or must, their pungent qualities developed, hence “burning.” Mustard seeds are mentioned in ancient Sanskrit writings dating back about 5,000 years ago and the Bible calls mustard “the greatest among the herbs.” Valued for their intense flavors and healing properties, mustard seed and the plant itself have been grown for its beautiful yellow flowers and spicy seedling leaves. Members of the Brassicaceae family, mustard is a cruciferous vegetable related to cabbage, Brussel sprouts, kale, kohlrabi, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, rutabagas, turnips, radishes, horseradish, cress, and broccoli with the attendant phytochemicals properties.

Mustard is categorized as a food, medicine, spice, and condiment. White mustard (*Sinapis alba*) also known as yellow mustard is a native of North Africa, central Asia, and the Mediterranean. This is the mustard that is used extensively in the production of American prepared mustards, as it is the least pungent. Brown mustard (*Brassica juncea*) is native to Asia and is the seed used to prepare specialty mustards such as Dijon. Canada is the world’s largest exporter of mustard seed and among the top five producers in the world. Saskatchewan produces over 80% of the domestic total and the brown mustard seed used for Dijon mustard comes from Saskatchewan.

Mustard seeds contain many healing properties and have been used for centuries by Chinese herbalists to treat abscesses, bronchitis, colds, rheumatism, toothache, ulcers, and stomach disorders. They are an excellent source of monounsaturated fats, phosphorous, and a good source of iron, calcium, zinc, magnesium, and manganese. Mustard seeds have been shown to help reduce the severity of asthma, decrease some of the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis, and help prevent cancer. Mustard plasters are still being used today to treat rheumatism, arthritis, chest congestion, aching back, and sore muscles.

To make a mustard plaster, mix equal parts powdered mustard and wheat flour, dilute the mixture with sufficient cold water to achieve a soft paste. Spread on a clean cloth such as cotton flannel, linen, or several layers of muslin. Remember that mustard is a hot herb and contact with the skin may cause blistering and should be avoided. Leave on for approximately 15 minutes. If the patient complains at any time during treatment, remove the plaster immediately. After the plaster is removed, bathe the treated area with cool (not cold) water to stop the burn. Dry the area and finish up with a dusting of baby powder or cornstarch to soothe the skin.

Mustard greens are the leaves of the mustard plant *Brassica juncea*. Mustard greens originated in the Himalayan region of India and have been grown and consumed for more than 5,000 years. All young mustard leaves can be used for mustard greens, however Chinese mustards or mustard greens (*Brassica juncea* var. *rugosa*), broad-leaved mustard greens, or (*Brassica juncea* var. *foliosa*), thin-leaved mustard greens, are the best mustards for greens. These varieties are also known as gai choy, Indian mustard, leaf mustard, mustard cabbage, Bamboo mustard cabbage, and Sow cabbage. Mustard greens are a staple vegetable in many cultures around the world. They are used much as spinach, dandelion, or beet greens are used (see recipe for Sautéed Mustard Greens).

Mustard greens are an excellent source of vitamin E, vitamin C, and beta-carotene. They also contain vitamin B6, folic acid, magnesium, calcium, iron, niacin, vitamin A, and are an excellent source of phytochemicals thought to prevent cancer. In Chinese herbal medicine, mustard greens are used to treat bladder inflammations and to stop hemorrhage. Eating mustard greens is thought to offer great benefit to individuals suffering from conditions ranging from asthma to heart disease to menopausal symptoms.

Mustards are annuals and grow from 2-4 feet (60-120 cm) tall. The flowers produced are yellow and the white mustard flowers have a slight vanilla scent. They are known as cruciferous plants because they have four-petaled flowers, two long and two short that resemble a cross. Both mustards have pungent-flavored, broad, dark green, jagged with irregularly cut lower leaves. Mustard is a cool season crop and bolts quickly in warm weather.

Mustards can be started indoors or planted directly into the soil in early spring. If you are starting mustards indoors, adequate light is essential. Hang lights 3 inches (7.5 cm) above the seedlings and leave lights on for 16 hours a day. They prefer a rich, moist, well-prepared soil with adequate drainage. Plant seeds at a depth of ¼ inch (6 mm) and follow directions on the seed packet. They grow best in full sun and need to be kept moist during the growing season. Space mustards 6 inches (15 cm) apart. Harvest your mustard plants for greens when the leaves are young and tender, for cooked greens when the leaves are mature, and for seed when the seedpods take on a brownish tinge.

In the kitchen, whole mustard seeds are used in sauerkraut, cabbage, pickles, relishes, curries, sauces, pot roasts, and to flavour meats such as lamb, pork, and rabbit. Use fresh flowers as an edible garnish or cook flowers for 2-3 minutes in boiling salted water. Drain and serve with butter and sea salt to taste. Mustard seeds can be sprouted and used in salads, sandwiches, or as a garnish. Young mustard greens are great additions to salads and stir-fry dishes.

To make your own mustard condiment, grind, crack, or crush the mustard seeds. Macerate the seeds in wine, vinegar, or water. Make sure the liquid is cold as this causes the chemical reaction that releases the heat and pungency of the seed. Grind them into a smooth paste, adding herbs and spices such as tarragon, horseradish, crushed hot peppers, turmeric, garlic, pepper, paprika, ginger, or hot pepper sauce. Additional options are honey, dark ale, beer, whiskey, wine, wine vinegar, Scotch, or brown sugar.

Fruit mustards are made with lemon, lime, orange, or berries. (If you don't want to bother with grinding your own seed, start with mustard powder or use your favorite prepared mustard and add whatever additions you like.) Prepared mustard is used in vinaigrettes, marinades for meats, poultry, and seafood, mayonnaise, salad dressings, sauces, soups, and stews. Prepared mustards get their intense yellow color from the addition of turmeric.

Growing Rosemary - Herb of Remembrance and Friendship

Rosmarinus officinalis, commonly called rosemary is an aromatic herb indigenous to the Mediterranean area. Rosemary is traditionally known as the herb of remembrance and friendship. Also known as Mary's mantle and compass weed, rosemary is a lovely, sweet scented, shrubby perennial in Mediterranean countries that can be grown as an annual in Northern climates or as an indoor potted plant. Rosemary has needlelike leaves and delicate light blue flowers. Mature plants can live for over 30 years.

Rosemary grows best in full sun but will tolerate semi-shade. This plant grows best in light, well-drained soil. Let rosemary become moderately dry between waterings, as root rot can be a problem in soggy soils. Mist the leaves every second week. Rosemary grows 3 – 6 feet (1 – 2 m) tall outdoors. Indoors, rosemary benefits by harvesting tip cuttings that will keep the plant fuller and bushier. Rosemary's leaves are dark green on top with silvery undersides.

Rosemary is slow to germinate and grow from seed so it is best to buy plants or propagate rosemary from stem cuttings. If you are growing this herb indoors, rosemary thrives when moved outdoors for the summer. Leave rosemary in pots in the garden as it seems to be able to adjust to moving back in-doors more successfully. Move back indoors before the first frost, check for insects, and if there is an infestation, spray with a soap and water spray.

Rosemary requires at least 4 hours of direct sunlight a day. If you are growing rosemary on a windowsill, turn regularly to ensure every side receives light. If you are growing rosemary under lights, hang fluorescent lights 6 inches (15 cm) above the plants and leave on for 12 hours.

In the garden, rosemary deters cabbage moth, bean beetles, and carrot fly when planted near cabbage, beans, carrots, and sage. In Italy, rosemary is the preferred herb with lamb, veal, and poultry particularly when simmered with olive oil, garlic, and wine. Rosemary should always be used with lamb as it enhances the meat with incomparable flavour.

Other uses in the kitchen include tomato dishes, stews, soups, vegetable dishes, pork, rabbit, sausages, fish, shellfish, finely chopped in custards, egg dishes, pickles, jellies, jams, cakes, cookies, salads, and is an essential ingredient in herb breads and biscuits, including focaccia, the classic Italian bread. Rosemary can be added to the cooking water to enliven cauliflower, potatoes, green beans, and peas. Marinades for fish and meats as well as minestrone, chicken, and pea soups benefit from the addition of rosemary. Rosemary has a strong flavour so use sparingly. Leaves, stems, and flowers are all edible. To release the flavour of dried leaves, crush them just before using. Rosemary stems can be used for herb skewers by stripping the leaves and threading vegetables or tender cuts of meat on the stems for broiling.

Rosemary can be kept in the fridge for a few days either in plastic bags or with the stems immersed in water. The leaves can be dried by hanging fresh sprigs in a warm, dry place. Strip off leaves before storing.

Growing Thyme - Herb of Courage

Garden thyme, fresh or dried, alone or combined with parsley and bay leaves to make a bouquet garni, adds a distinctive aromatic flavoring to meats, poultry, stews, sauces, and stuffing. *Thymus vulgaris*, commonly known as cooking thyme, English thyme, French thyme, or winter thyme is just one of the 350 species of the genus *Thymus*. Often called the 'herb of courage,' garden thyme can be grown indoors or out. Thyme is a shrubby perennial with small, oval, narrow, grey-green leaves, long, woody, branched stems, and sturdy roots. This plant blooms in mid-summer and has lavender-pink flowers that occur in small clusters. The flowers attract bees and the honey produced is highly valued. The leaves are very aromatic. Leaves, stems, and flowers may all be eaten.

Garden thyme grows 6 – 20 inches (15 – 50 cm) tall, prefers light, well-drained soil, and full sun. Allow soil to dry between watering, as this plant is susceptible to root rot and will not survive long in heavy wet soils. Thyme can be propagated by stem cuttings, seeds, and layering.

Pot outdoor plants for bringing indoors in the fall. Check for insects and spray with a soap and water spray if required. Indoor plants require at least 5 hours of strong sunlight a day. If placed on a windowsill, turn plants frequently to ensure all sides receive equal exposure to the light. If growing under fluorescents, hang lights 6 inches (15 cm) above the plants and leave on for 14 hours a day.

In the garden, plant thyme anywhere as it deters cabbageworm and accents the aromatic qualities of other plants and herbs. In the kitchen, thyme is often used in sausage and other fatty foods such as lamb, pork, duck, or goose as it aids in the digestive process. Generally speaking, in the kitchen, dried thyme is used, as it is preferred for cooking. This herb enhances the flavor of tomato sauces, casseroles, soup, spaghetti sauce, eggs, potatoes, fish, green vegetables, chowders, seafood of all kinds, breads, roasted meats, marinades for meats, plain rice, and tea.

Thyme is especially good in recipes that call for long, slow cooking as it is one of the few herbs that does not lose flavor in cooking, so can be added early. Sprigs can be placed in the water of steamed or boiled vegetables, or used to make thyme-scented vinegar or oil. Fresh leaves and flowers can be used in tossed green salads, and use the leaves, fresh or dried, for butter and cooking oil. Strip the leaves from stems when using fresh. Chopped fresh leaves are much more pungent than dried so use sparingly if substituting for dried in a recipe. The dried flowers and/or leaves are often combined with rosemary and spearmint to make an aromatic tea said to be useful for calming the nerves and soothing headaches.

Thyme can be preserved by freezing or drying. To dry, lay the stems of thyme flat or hang them in bunches in a shady, dry location. Strip the dry leaves from the stems and store in an airtight container. To freeze, lie on a cookie pan, freeze, store in airtight freezer bags, and use as required.

Bouquet Garni

2 sprigs parsley

1 sprig thyme

Tie together with white string, immerse in cooking liquid, and remove before serving.

Bouquet garni are flavouring agents composed of herbs tied together and immersed in liquids, early in the process of cooking to enhance the flavour of dishes such as soups, stews, and some vegetables. You can make bouquet garni ahead-of-time and preserve their flavour by tying in bundles, place in plastic bags, label and date them, and freeze for later use.

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