

# Tips for the Consumer: The Culture and Uses of Herbs

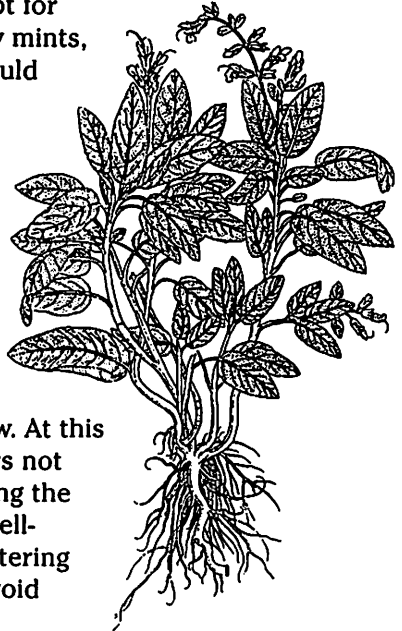
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**M**ore retail growers are selling herbs as they continue to gain in popularity with the consumer. Retailers can increase herb sales and customer satisfaction with their purchase by using an attractive display of herbs combined with concise information on the culture and use of herbs. The following text and tables include information on how to grow, harvest and use some of the more popular herbs.

Gardeners can design a separate herb garden or include herbs in their vegetable or flower garden. Herbs can be grown in hanging baskets for use throughout the summer, or a combination of herbs may be planted into large pottery pots to be placed on a deck or patio.

In general, most herbs will need full sun (six to eight hours) and very well-drained soil, except for the moisture-loving mints. Many mints, due to their invasive nature, should be planted in a container to be placed in the ground. Some perennial herbs benefit from the addition of winter protection by mulching with straw, oak leaves or evergreen branches.

The more tender perennials, including lemon grass, lemon verbena or rosemary, must be brought inside for the winter and placed in a sunny window. At this time, it is important for gardeners not to overwater these herbs. Growing the herbs in a clay pot, selecting a well-drained growing medium and watering only when needed will help to avoid this common problem.



**Table 1. Some of the more popular annual herbs.**

| <b>Herb</b>  | <b>Culture</b>  | <b>Harvesting Tips</b>  | <b>Culinary Uses</b>   |
|--|---|---|--|
| Basil<br>(Sweet)<br>( <i>Ocimum basilicum</i> )                                | Full sun, rich, well drained soil. Pinch back to promote bushy growth. Many varieties available. Use dwarf varieties as an edging plant or in containers. | Harvest fresh leaves before plant flowers for maximum flavor. Make final harvest before cool (40°) nights slow growth. Basil is very sensitive to frost injury. | Use in tomato dishes, soups, salads, stews omelettes; or as pesto (Italian pasta sauce). Preserve as basil vinegar or oil.   |
| Cilantro/<br>Coriander<br>( <i>Coriandrum sativum</i> )                        | Full sun to partial shade, light garden soil. Select slow-to-bolt varieties to extend leaf harvest, or sow weekly to prolong harvest.                     | Harvest fresh leaves as needed. Harvest seed heads after the first seeds have turned brown.   | Leaves are used in Mexican cooking. Use in salsa, guacamole, and vegetable dishes. Seeds are used as a condiment in desserts or added to Indian curries.                                     |
| Dill<br>( <i>Anethum graveolens</i> )  | Full sun, well-drained soil. Make successive sowings to ensure a supply of fresh leaves.  | Pick leaves when plants are four to five inches tall or just as flowers open. Pick seeds when they are fully developed.   | Use fresh leaves in salads, omelettes, vegetable dishes and with mild flavored cheeses. Use in soup and fish dishes. Green seeds are used to make dill pickles.                              |
| Fennel<br>( <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> )<br>Florence fennel ( <i>F. dulce</i> ) | Full sun, light, well-drained soil.   | Harvest leaves as needed. Pick seeds when ripe. Harvest tender stems and bulbs of Florence fennel.  | Use fennel leaves in sauces, salads, cheese spreads and vegetable dishes. Fennel seeds are used as a condiment with an anise-like flavor. Florence fennel is widely used in Italian cuisine. |
| Parsley<br>( <i>Petroselinum crispum</i> )                                     | Partial shade, rich, moist soil. Parsley is an biennial that is treated as an annual. May be grown indoors.   | Harvest fresh outer leaves as needed. Best when used fresh.   | Add to soups, salads, egg or potato dishes. High in iron and Vitamin A and C. Preferred culinary variety is flat-leaved Italian type.  |

| <b>Herb</b>  | <b>Culture</b>  | <b>Harvest</b>  | <b>Culinary Uses</b>  |
|--|---|---|---|
| Anise<br>Hyssop<br>( <i>Agastache foeniculum</i> )             | Full sun. Easily grown. Will easily reseed, itself. Use for rear of the border.                               | Harvest young leaves or flowers as needed.  | Use leaves for a tea. Use edible flowers in salads, iced drinks, tea breads and dessert dishes. |
| Bay (Sweet)<br>( <i>Laurus nobilis</i> )                       | Tender perennial grown in a container. Place in a sheltered location outdoors. Bring inside in winter.        | Harvest this slow-growing herb sparingly. Leaves will dry well and keep their flavor.       | Use in soups, stews, sauces and marinades. Widely used in French and Mediterranean cooking.     |
| Catnip<br>( <i>Nepeta cataria</i> )                            | Partial shade, rich well drained soil. Easy to grow.  | Harvest leaves for drying.  | Use in teas and seasonings, highly attractive to cats.  |
| Chives<br>( <i>Allium schoenoprasum</i> )                      | Partial shade, prefers soil rich in organic matter. Use as a border plant.                                    | Cut fresh leaves as needed. If cut back two inches, it will regrow. May freeze or dry, too. | Use for delicate onion-like flavoring in salads, omelettes or add to mild cheeses.              |
| French Tarragon<br>( <i>Artemisia dracunculus</i> )            | Full sun to partial shade, well drained soil. Need winter protection.   | Harvest fresh young leaves and stem tips.   | Use in salads, marinades and sauces or add to chicken and fish dishes.                          |
| Greek Oregano<br>( <i>Origanum vulgare</i> )                   | Full sun, will grow in poor soil.   | Use fresh leaves as needed. Harvest leaves for drying before flowering.                     | Use as flavoring on pizza and Italian-type sauces.  |
| Lavender<br>( <i>Lavandula vera</i> or <i>L. officinalis</i> ) | Full sun, very well-drained soil with adequate lime. Dwarf types ie. Hidcote or Munstead Dwarf are available. | Cut whole flower spikes when the first flowers begin to open and then dry.                  | Use in sachets and perfumes.  |
| Lemon Grass<br>( <i>Cymbopogon citratus</i> )                  | Partial shade, well-drained soil. Tender perennial, bring inside for the winter.                              | Harvest leaves after plant is established. Leaves may be frozen or dried.                   | Use as seasoning in southeast Asian dishes, in soups or as a tea.                               |
| Marjoram<br>( <i>Origanum majorana</i> )                       | Full sun, rich well drained soil. Tender perennial. Use as a border plant.                                    | Harvest leaves as needed before blooming.   | Use in soups, egg dishes, potato salad.   |

**Table 2. Some of the more popular perennial herbs.**

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| Orange Mint or Orange Bergamot ( <i>Mentha citrata</i> ) | Partial shade, moist soil.   | Use fresh leaves as needed.  | Use as a tea. Orange bergamot is flavoring for Earl Grey tea.                 |
| Peppermint ( <i>Mentha peperita</i> )                    | Partial shade, prefers moist soil.   | Use fresh leaves as needed. Harvest leaves for drying before flowering.  | Use as tea or iced drink.   |
| Rosemary ( <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> )               | Full sun, well-drained soil. Grow this tender perennial as a pot plant so it may be brought indoors in the winter. | Harvest fresh leaves as needed, or before flowering. Preserve by drying. | Use to flavor pork, veal and lamb or fish dishes. Add to breads and biscuits. |
| Sage ( <i>Salvia officinalis</i> )                       | Full sun, well-drained soil.   | Pick leaves before or at blooming. Easily dried.                         | Use in sausages, stews or soups or to season stuffing for poultry.            |
| Spearmint ( <i>Mentha spicata</i> )                      | Partial shade, prefers moist soil.   | Harvest fresh leaves anytime.  | Use in teas, iced fruit drinks.   |
| Thyme ( <i>Thymus vulgaris</i> )                         | Full sun, well-drained soil. For use as a ground cover or edging plant. Many varieties available.                  | Cut leafy tops and flower clusters when first blossoms open and dry.     | Use in soups, vegetable dishes or chowders.                                   |

Herbs are easy to grow in containers, on a patio, in a window box or as part of your vegetable or annual flower gardens. Add herbs to your cooking by harvesting herbs when they are at their peak of flavor. For additional information, consult the following references.

## References

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