

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

## family Vegetable Garden Series

EXTENSION BULLETIN E-824(5)

# Herbs

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**HERBS** are truly a cook's "Secret Weapon." They give foods a better flavor, dress up the simplest dishes, and can be used to decorate the home indoors and outdoors. They require little space and can be easily grown in an apartment-sized plot, among flowers, as part of the vegetable garden, or in pots and containers in a window.

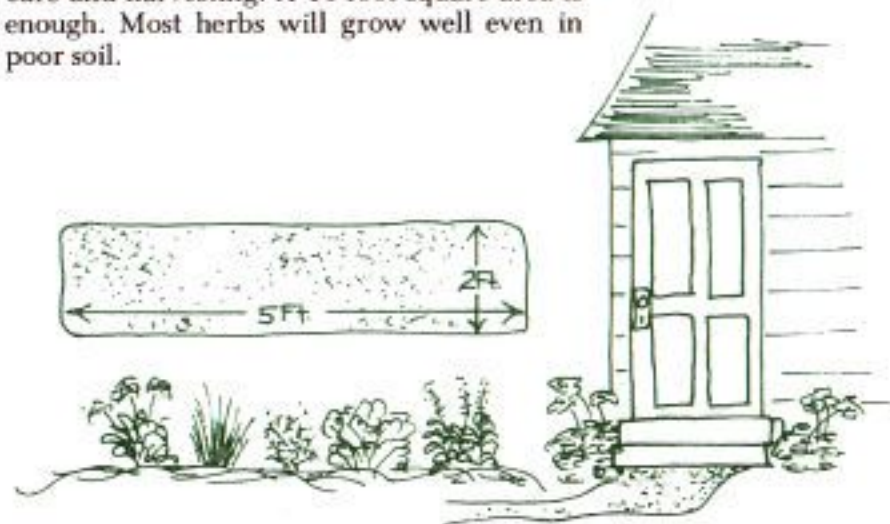
Herbs are needed only in small amounts to flavor foods. Three to four plants of most herbs provide enough seasoning for the average family until the next season. Herbs may be annual, biennial, or perennial as indicated in the herb chart (inside).



## WHERE TO GROW

Indoors in a window with lots of sun or bright light; in well-drained soil that does not hold water in large amounts.

Outdoors in full sunlight or sometimes semi-shaded areas. Be sure soil is well-drained. Grow herbs near the house so they are close-by for easy care and harvesting. A 10-foot square area is enough. Most herbs will grow well even in poor soil.





## PROPAGATING HERBS

Herbs are commonly propagated by seeds, layering, cuttings, and division. Follow directions on packets when propagating by seeds. Many herbs reseed themselves, so once they become established, they may persist for a long time even though they are annuals (chives and dill for example).

## HARVESTING



Cut leaves as needed after plants have grown enough to have a good number of leaves. Harvest herbs like rosemary and thyme by cutting the tops at full bloom. Harvest basil, sage, and marjoram before the flowers open up.



BASIL



DILL



CHIVES

## HOW TO CARE FOR

Care for an herb garden just as you would a vegetable or flower garden. Remember, choose a sunny location with well-drained soil.

Fertilizers are not usually needed except on herbs which are cut many times such as chives or parsley. Too much fertilizer can hurt flavor.

Mints may spread fast, especially in moist soil. Grow them in containers sunk in the soil to keep them from getting weedy.



GARLIC



SAGE



PARSLEY

## HERB HARVEST CHART

HERB	HEIGHT (Inches)	SPACING BETWEEN:			USE
		Rows (Inches)	Plants (Inches)		
<b>ANNUAL HERBS</b>					
Anise	24	18	10	Clip leaves when plants start to flower.	Leaves in salads; seeds for cookies, pastries.
Basil, Sweet	20-24	18	12	Cut 6" above ground.	Leaves in soups, stews, salads, fish sauces, meats.
Borage	24	18	12	Harvest young leaves when in flower.	Leaves in salads or cooked like spinach.
Coriander	36	24	18	Cut stalks when seeds are ripe.	Crushed seeds in meat sauces, pickles, cookies, breads.
Dill	24-36	24	12	Pick whole stems and hang upside down to dry.	Seed heads in cheese, eggs, pickles; seeds in soups, gravies, vegetables.
Fennel, Sweet	60	18	18	Harvest leaves when plants start to flower.	Leaves and seeds for seasoning vegetables, fish.
Summer Savory	18	18	18	Harvest young shoots when plant starts to flower.	Leaves fresh or dried with meats, fish, soups, beans.
<b>BIENNIAL HERBS</b>					
Caraway	12-24	18	10	Cut seed heads before dry.	Leaves in salads, seeds in breads, cakes, soups.
Parsley	6	18	6	Cut as needed or dry in oven.	In salads or dried as addition to vegetables, sauces.
<b>PERENNIAL HERBS</b>					
Chives	12	12	12	Cut leaves as needed for fresh use. Can also be frozen.	Leaves in soup, salads, omelets, sauces.
Garlic	30	12	8	Harvest bulbs after leaves have dried down.	Cloves in meats, stews, salads.
Lavender	24	18	18	Harvest flower spikes when in full bloom.	Flowers in potpourris, sachets, flower arrangements.
Lemon Balm	24	24	12	Cut tips.	Leaves in soups, meats, tea, summer drinks.
Oregano	24	18	9	Use leaves fresh or dried.	Leaves in soups, roasts, stews, salads.
Peppermint	18	24	9	Harvest young sprigs and leaves until plant starts to flower.	Leaves fresh or dried in potpourris, fruit cocktails, or with ice cream.
Rosemary	36	18	12	Cut leaves just before flowering.	Leaves and small stems in meat, sauces, soups.
Sage	18	24	12	Cut young tips, dry.	Leaves in meats, teas, fish, dressings, stews.
Spearmint	18	24	9	Same as for peppermint.	Leaves for garnishing iced drinks; lamb, jelly.
Sweet Marjoram	12	18	12	Use fresh or dried leaves.	Leaves in salads, soups, dressings.
Tarragon	24	24	24	Harvest leaves anytime (best time is when plant starts to flower).	Leaves fresh or dried in salads, with fish.
Thyme	8-12	18	12	Cut shoots when first flowers open.	Leaves in soups, salad dressing, gravies, breads, sauces.

\*This is just a partial list of herbs, others are discussed in various books & bulletins.





## PRESERVING HERBS

Most herbs are preserved by drying. To dry herbs, tie loosely in small bunches and hang upside down in an airy, dust-free room, or spread the herbs loosely on a screen or cheese cloth. Be sure the room is cool. Do not apply heat or let sunlight hit plants or some flavor will be lost. When leaves have dried enough to become brittle, crush the leaves and flowers and place in tightly covered glass jars and store in a dark location to keep the leaves from fading. Label each jar.

Sprigs of most herbs can also be frozen. Chives are usually chopped before freezing. Blanching may help retain flavor.



KEYS  
TO  
SUCCESS

- Start with only a few kinds
- Grow in full sunlight
- Pick at the right time
- Use sparingly

*Other bulletins in this series provide additional information on vegetable gardening.*

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