



HUME CITY COUNCIL LIVE GREEN FREE WORKSHOP

Healthy herbs from your garden

Torn basil on a pasta bowl, chopped coriander on a curry, chives and parsley over eggs - flavourful fresh herbs make a meal special. But herbs can do so much more for you: hot or iced herbal teas, herbal salads, oils, balms and even gifts. Herbs are one of the most nutritious additions to your diet, but also the most expensive to buy and often go wasted, and they're never in the fridge when you need them! Luckily most are simple to grow at home. Here's some tips on growing herbs at home and using them for a whole lot more besides cooking.

Where should I grow my herbs?

Any herbs that you intend to use for regularly cooking or teas should be as close to the kitchen as practically possible. No doubt you'll have good intentions now, but trust me that getting a few sprigs of rosemary to finish off those roast potatoes in the middle of winter just won't happen if the bush is tucked down the back of a cold, wet garden.



You also need to make sure that each herb has the right microclimate. It's a good idea to plant your herbs in patches or pots that prefer the same conditions. For example you might have pots that are shaded and moist, sunny and dry, part sun and moist etc.

Sun ↑ ↓ Shade	Sunny and dry rosemary, sage, thyme, oregano, marjorum, winter savory, lemon verbena, lemongrass, lavender, chives, shallots, garlic chives	Sunny and moist rivermint, common mint, lovage, stevia, lemon balm, parsley
	Part shade and dry chives, shallots, garlic chives, parsley	Part shade and moist mints including common mint, peppermint, vietnamese mint etc, Lebanese landcress, parsley
	Dry -----> Moist	



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NB: Some herbs appear in more than one box because they tolerate a wide range of conditions, but they'll be more productive in a sunny, moist spot.

NB: Some herbs like lemon balm, peppermint and chives die back to their roots or a low clump in winter and will reemerge in spring.

Most of these herbs are very forgiving, but do loosen your soil with a garden fork if it's compacted, work 1-2 inches of compost into the top few inches of soil and mulch well over summer.

I grow my herbs right near my back door on a mound of soil that has dry and sunny spots at the top, and moist and shaded spots at the base. It's only 2m² but I picked nearly 10kg herbs from it last year!

I find it easiest to grow herbs with similar growth patterns together, so I have a perennial herb patch, self-seeding herb areas, and grow my annual herbs (eg. basil and coriander) in the annual vegie patch. Basil is a summer annual that needs to be planted into warm soil – plant seeds in October and seedlings in November. Coriander is an annual that dislikes hot, dry weather. It is best planted in autumn for a winter crop, or early spring for a summer crop before hot weather arrives. Bay leaves are produced on a tree, but you can keep a bay tree pruned in a small pot.

Herbs that won't be needed regularly or are needed in larger quantities can be scattered throughout your garden, where many will attract beneficial insects, act as living mulches, accumulate nutrients, as well as providing luscious scents and beauty.

Propagating herbs

You could spend lots of cash setting up a herb garden, but luckily most culinary herbs are easy to propagate for free!

Herbs from division

Herbs with a clumping growth pattern are usually propagated by division, which is simply digging up the clump and slicing it into sections. Some herbs that can be divided include chives, oregano, marjoram, lemon balm, mints, landcress.

Herbs from cuttings

Many woody herbs are propagated from cuttings. This is most easily done by taking small sections of herb in winter. Some herbs that can be grown from cuttings include rosemary, lavender, thyme, lemon verbena. Many of these herbs can also be grown by layering – just bend a stem down to the ground and pin it there with a rock, wait a few months and then cut the new rooted herb from the mother plant.

Herbs from seed

Herbs that are annual or biennial (growing for only one or two years) are started from seeds. These include annual herbs like basil and coriander, and biennial herbs like dill, fennel and parsley. Plant the seeds in punnets twice as deep as the width of the seed, keep moist and protect from pests. Many of these herbs will happily grow themselves if you allow them to flower and drop seeds.

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Maintaining your herb patch

Once your herbs are established they should be easy to maintain. I give mine a light feed of organic fertiliser (1/2 handful per m²) and compost (1/2 inch per m²) every year, plus an occasional water with worm juice or seaweed extract. I mulch well over summer and also 'chop and drop' any prunings by leaving them under the herbs. Be aware that Mediterranean herbs like rosemary, thyme and sage need drier soil, so save extra water for the herbs that need it like mints and parsley etc.

To keep your herbs compact and stimulate new growth, keep pinching out the tips of the growing shoots whenever you pick them. This will force the herb to branch, creating two new shoots and a bushier shape.

Storing your herbs

As a gardener you get to 'store' your herbs in the garden, but here are some other ways to preserve a surplus or enjoy summer herbs in winter etc

- Dry herbs by hanging small bunches in a shaded but airy spot until they are crispy.
- Freeze chopped herbs in ice cube trays covered with oil, or as pesto
- Make herbed butter by mashing chopped herbs (eg. basil, chives, parsley) into butter, forming into a roll and storing in the fridge or freezer.
- Infuse dried herbs in oil or vinegar for lovely salad dressings or as a base for herbal balms

Getting more from your herb patch

Most people think of growing herbs for the kitchen, but a herb patch can do so much more!

- Make your own herbal teas: peppermint, lemon verbena, lavender, chamomile. You'll get a stronger flavour if the herbs are dried first. Don't forget to make herbal iced teas in summer! Lovely combined with some fruit eg. cucumber and mint, berries and lavender
- Herbal salads. You wouldn't eat a salad made only of lemon balm leaves, but a mix of finely chopped herbs balance out to make a surprisingly delicious salad without a single lettuce leaf !
- Make your own scented bath salts: mix dried herbs like lavender, rose petals and calendula with Epsom salts for a lovely relaxing bath
- Take bunches of herbs to a food swap and exchange them for fruits, vegies, eggs, honey, seeds and seedlings etc
- Ask your local bakery or café if they'll swap herbs for bread or coffee
- Herbs make great gifts too! Save a small fortune by giving a lovingly handmade herbal tea, bath salts, pesto or balm, or even an established herb garden in a pot.

Happy gardening!

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