

HOW TO GROW AND COOK HERBS

Kate Kappel Haba

Prince George's County Master Gardener

University of Maryland Extension



Introduction

- Why grow herbs?



Topics covered today

- About herbs
- Requirements for growing herbs
- The Herb garden
- Propagation
- Caring for your herb plants
- Harvesting your herbs
- Cooking and preserving herbs

About Herbs

- What are herbs?
- Uses for herbs
- How do you choose which herbs to grow?
- Culinary and Beneficial uses for herbs
 - Culinary herbs can be used in food or drinks
 - Examples: Basil, thyme, leaf celery, lemon verbena
 - Beneficial herbs can be used in companion planting and to attract beneficial insects
 - Examples: Borage, Bee Balm

About Herbs: Annual vs. Perennial

- Annual & Biennial Herbs

- Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)
- Borage (*Borago officinalis*)
- Celery (*Apium graveolens dulce*)
- Chervil (*Anthriscus cere folium*)
- Cilantro (*Coriander sativum*)
- Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)
- Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*) (B)

- Perennial Herbs

- Bay (*Laurus nobilis*)
- Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*)
- Camomile (*Anthemis nobilis*)
- Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)
- Lavender (*Lavendula spied*)
- Oregano (*Origanum species*)
- Rosemary (*Rosmariuns officinalis*)
- Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)
- Tarragon (*Artemisia drancunculus*)
- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)

Requirements: Site

- Site for growing herbs:
 - Should receive at least 6 hours of direct sun each day
 - Should have good drainage
 - Avoid location with standing water
 - Avoid slope (soil erosion)
- What to do if your site is not “perfect”:
 - Terrace a sloped area
 - Build raised beds (improves drainage)
 - Herbs for shadier locations:
 - Anise hyssop, parsley, lemon balm
- Indoor site for potted herbs:
 - Should receive 5 hours of sunlight or 14-16 hours fluorescent light daily
 - Keep away from drafts or temperature extremes

Requirements: Soil

- Soil for growing herbs:
 - Ideal soil texture is loam
 - Should have a pH of 6.5-7.0
- What to do if your soil is not “perfect”:
 - Add organic matter to improve texture, water retention, drainage
 - Adjust the pH of your soil
 - Before you adjust your pH you should do a soil test. Information on testing your soil can be found online at the University of Maryland Extension website

Requirements: Water & Fertilizer

- Watering herbs
 - Infrequently & deeply (vs. shallow & frequent)
 - Rule of thumb: one inch of water per week (test with your finger)
 - When to water: when the surface of the soil feels dry
 - Perennials can tolerate drought better than annuals
 - Annuals tolerate extra water
 - Don't overwater: herbs are susceptible to root rots
 - Conserve water by adding mulch to the soil around your herbs
- Fertilizing herbs:
 - Use sparingly. Excess fertilizer, especially nitrogen can decrease essential oils (i.e. flavor)



Propagating herbs

- Start herbs from seed
 - Relatively easy with Annual herbs
 - Perennial herb seeds may require special action such as stratification or extended germination time
- Asexual
 - Cutting, layering, dividing
- Transplants
 - Purchase transplants
- When to sow seeds or plant transplants:
 - Refer to the local last frost dates

Starting herbs from seed

- Direct sow
 - Follow instructions on seed packet for depth and spacing
 - Do not let dry out
 - Use gentle over head watering until seedlings appear, then water near base of plants
- Start seeds indoors
 - Start 6-8 weeks before planting outdoors
 - Use sterile seed starting medium
 - Do not let seedlings get dry – consider bottom watering
 - Provide enough light – keep light source close to tops of seedlings
 - Harden off transplants before planting outside
- Thin seedlings with both methods

Asexual Propagation

- Use for perennials or herbs difficult to grow by seed
- Cutting:
 - Take a 3"-4" cutting of a healthy stem (not yet woody)
 - Strip leaves from bottom portion
 - Dip in rooting hormone & place in rooting medium
 - Keep moist, cover with plastic to retain moisture
 - When new leaves appear plant can be transplanted
- Layering:
 - Select branch near base of plant
 - Remove foliage and branches
 - Bend the stem gently to soil, secure with "U" shaped wire
 - Once rooting has occurred, cut from parent plant and transplant

Transplanting

- To purchase a transplant:
 - Buy from a reputable source to avoid importing pests or disease
 - Check carefully to ensure health of the plant:
 - Should display no signs of wilt, yellowing or other discoloring, or other visible defect
- Planting
 - Dig hole at least three times width of roots
 - Add organic matter
 - Add plant and replace soil
 - Water well
 - Continue to water well until plant is established

Caring for your herb plants

- Dealing with pests or diseases:
 - Do not use traditional pesticides
 - Mites and aphids are normally controlled by natural predators
 - In extreme cases insecticidal soap can be used (for aphids, mites, whiteflies)
 - Larger pests can be handpicked
 - Any plants affected by soil-borne diseases should be removed and destroyed (do not compost)
- Harvest or pinch back herbs regularly
 - Herbs will be bushier if pinched back
 - Do not allow herbs to flower and set seed until late in the season
 - Pinch off flowers
 - If allowed to flower leaf production will decline

Harvesting Herbs

- Harvest after plant has enough leaves to maintain growth
- Herbs can be harvested until frost
- Tips:
 - Harvest in the morning
 - Harvest Tarragon & Lavender in early summer, then cut entire plant to half it's height to encourage a second flowering
- Perennials:
 - Harvest from late spring until one month before first frost date
 - Keeping perennials harvested will improve winter hardiness
- Use herbs soon after harvesting
 - Cut herbs can be stored for a longer time in a glass of water with a plastic bag over it loosely to retain moisture

Uses for herbs

- Wash and dry herbs before using
- Cooking with herbs:
 - Substitute fresh herbs for dry in recipes
 - 2 teaspoons of fresh or frozen herbs = 1 teaspoon dried
- Preserving herbs:
 - Air dry herbs by hanging upside down
 - Dry in the microwave
 - Freeze herbs
- Oils & Vinegars:
 - Steep herbs in olive oil or vinegar, then strain and discard herb
- Add to home preserved foods:
 - Pickles, tomato sauces, etc (follow preserving instructions explicitly)

Recipes with fresh herbs

- Green Salad with fresh herbs:
 - Roughly chop a mix of fresh herbs and add to green salad
 - My favorite: leaf celery, sage, basil, oregano
- Fresh Corn Salad with fresh herbs:
 - Cook corn and cut from cobb. Add chopped mixed fresh herbs along with olive oil, salt, pepper to taste. Chopped tomatoes optional.
 - My favorite mix: leaf celery, sage, basil, oregano
- Scrambled eggs with herbs:
 - Finely chop fresh herbs. Add to scrambled eggs just before adding to pan.
 - My favorite: thyme or basil

More recipes with fresh herbs

- Pesto:
 - Using a food processor, chop a large amount of basil leaves with pine nuts, garlic, and salt. Add grated parmesan cheese and olive oil. Adjust seasoning. Freezes well.
- Caprese Salad:
 - Alternate layers of sliced fresh mozzarella, sliced tomatoes, and basil leaves. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt
- Roast chicken with herbs
 - Rub chopped mixed herbs with salt and pepper on chicken. Use butter or olive oil on skin. Roast until done.
- Any favorite recipes to share?

Resources

- University of Maryland Extension
 - Website: <http://extension.umd.edu/>
 - Grow it Eat it Website: <http://growit.umd.edu/>
- Catalogs with large selection of herb seeds:
 - Southern Exposure Seed Exchange
 - Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds
 - Bountiful Gardens
 - Seeds of Change
 - Territorial Seed Company
 - Seed Savers Exchange
 - Pinetree Garden Seeds
 - John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds

Questions?