

HOW TO START A HERB GARDEN

16, June, 2020

Most herbs grown today are still the wild species, although there are many cultivars now available changing the colour of their leaves or flowers. The main focus points for herbs is their fragrance, which comes from their leaves as essential oils escape. That is the reason why herb gardens smell so strongly on a warm sunny day or if you crush their leaves.

*This knowledge can be used to help a gardener, as certain types of herbs can deter pests with their pungent smells like southernwood (*Artemisia arborescens*) deters insects.*

A herb garden is very beneficial to have whether it is a dedicated area, in pots or companion planted in the veg garden. They have so many uses- such as fresh herbs for cooking, using their flowers for potpourri, teas or in the flower garden.

WHERE TO GROW HERBS

A lot of herbs are medeteranian in origin, these like areas of good sun and a free-draining soil. There are however, herbs that withstand damp and partly-shady areas as long as it's still free draining soil.

Herbs for sun

Commonly used annual herbs such as coriander, dill, parsley and basil.

- *Chamomile - a perennial that dies back in the winter (herbaceous perennial) , these have masses of lovely white or yellow flowers that make relaxing teas. They can also become invasive with self seeding everywhere; to combat cut stems half way back when flowers begin to fade, this may also promote more flowering.*
- *Lavender - an evergreen shrub that really hates wet conditions, if you're growing this plant then make sure its soil is good quality or in a pot with added grit, sand or perlite.*
- *Fennel- herbaceous perennial that has very aromatic frilly and dainty leaves reach heights of 5m in mature plants !*
- *Rosemary- evergreen shrub that has white/purple flowers.*

-
- *Sage - evergreen shrub.*
 - *Calendula - a flowering annual with orange flowers*
 - *Echinacea - a herbaceous perennial with pink flowers !*

Herbs for shade

- *Lemon balm- a mint that has a lemony flavour and small, also a less invasive species.*
- *Mint - invasiveness can be controlled by keeping in a pot which can also be submerged into the ground to have in the garden- you can also choose less invasive species, like Pineapple mint. This is a perennial that dies back in the winter.*
- *Lovage -a tall herbaceous perennial that has a very distinct smell that stays when you handle the plant, good for cooking with i.e soups.*
- *Thyme*

Companion planting with herbs in the veg garden.

Mint (less invasive species i.e Pineapple mint or in a pot submerged in the ground) - plant near brassicas as it will deter cabbage moth.

Rosemary- deters carrot fly and bean beetles.

Chives (or anything in the allium family) - they deter aphids- also called greenfly.

Herbs in winter

To extend the harvest season and still have fresh herbs in winter time sow annuals like coriander, parsley in late summer or autumn. Herbaceous perennial herbs; these herbs die back in winter but regrow in spring, like chives, tarragon. These herbs can be dug up in early Autumn to either plant into a pot and take indoors or if they are mature divide them and you can plant into the pot and put one in the ground.

Soil preparation for your herbs

Herbs are happiest in a sunny and open area. They like light and free draining soil that's reasonably fertile.

To prep the soil, dig over in the winter and leave for the frost to break down and kill off diseases/ pests. In the spring, add in well- rotted organic matter like mushroom compost or garden compost (check out the home composting guide) then fork in and rake over. Try to avoid feeding with manures or artificial fertilizers as this causes herbs to have soft growth with little aroma or frost resistance.

If you have a heavy clay soil that you haven't worked with before then it will be best for the first year or two to grow your herbs in pots while you work on improving the soil (check out the soil care guide)
