

Growing Herbs

Herbs offer an amazing variety of shapes, sizes and scents for the garden. They are ornamental, useful and easy to grow. Incorporate herbs into the vegetable and flower garden, or plant them in a garden all their own.

POPULAR HERBS TO GROW ON THE WEST COAST

The list of herbs below are often grown by gardeners and chefs on the west coast. Most herbs are drought tolerant and so require excellent drainage. Also, herbs grown on the dry side, in poor nutrient situations tend to have more intense flavour. Almost all herbs prefer full sun, and need four hours of direct sunlight each day.

BASIL

Adds flavour to your soups, sauces, pasta, tomato dishes, salads, meats, and poultry. One of the most widely-used herbs. This annual is cold sensitive and should not be planted outside until late spring. Pinch off any flowers to encourage more leaf growth. Best used picked fresh. Grow indoors over the winter in a sunny window.

BAY LEAF

The large, leathery leaves are perfect to flavour soups, stews, and meat dishes. Plant them in a sheltered area (protected from the wind), in full sun, and with good drainage. Makes a handsome house plant when placed in a large, sunny window.

CHIVES

A versatile and classic herb that can be added to soups, eggs, vegetable, and of course baked potatoes. Plant chives close to the kitchen door for handy last minute sniping into salads and sauces. This is the first herb to emerge in late winter, and is a welcome sign of spring on the horizon. Fluffy, purple flowers appear in late spring and can be eaten in salads or used for garnish. For a distinct garlic taste try growing garlic chives.

DILL

The leaves and seeds have a unique flavour classic to a variety of foods including pickles, soups, sauces, fish, and salad dressing. Both the soft feathery leaves and umbrella-like clusters of attractive, tiny, yellow flowers have a distinct pungent fragrance. Plant in a full-sun, dill grows better in spring than summer and usually self-seeds after the first year.

CILANTRO/CORIANDER

This herb finds its way into a myriad of both Asian and Mexican recipes. It has also been a long favourite on British and European spice racks. You can grow this Mediterranean native for its leaves, which are known as cilantro, or for its dried seeds, called coriander. This is not a herb that can be cut and it grows again (called a cut-and-come-again herb) so plan to sow/ plant smaller, staggered, multiple crops for continuous harvesting. It grows best in full sun, with a well-drained nutrient rich soil. Keep a close eye on young plants to make sure they don't dry out, but once established coriander is drought hardy. If you are after the leaves, harvest the entire plant when it is about 6" (15cm) high.

MINT

A great addition to fruit salad, cooked vegetables, yogurt based sauces, a mojito on a hot day, or any other summer beverage, and of course a classic mint sauce for your roast lamb. Spearmint is the most popular mint used for cooking, but there are many other available. Each mint variety has a distinct flavour, aroma, and appearance. Look for apple, ginger, orange, and even chocolate mint. This plant is so easy to grow it can be slightly aggressive, so be mindful where you plant it. It can spread quickly so is a great plant for a container.

OREGANO

A very versatile herb, it is great in pasta sauces, stews, marinades, salad dressings or soup. For cooking, be sure to get the true Greek oregano. You may come across an oregano grown from seed, but the flavour is inferior by comparison. Golden oregano is much milder than Greek, but more colourful and it makes a wonderful edging. Plant in a warm sunny, well-drained site.

GARDENWORKS

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PARSLEY

More than just a garnish, add it to soups, stews, casseroles, eggs, cheese dishes, vegetables, salads, meats, and pasta. Fresh, green and compact, parsley makes a great edging plant for the garden. Or grow them in pots so you can bring them indoors for a fresh winter supply. Parsley is a biennial so you will need to replant yearly or allow it to go to seed.

ROSEMARY

This pungent herb is used to flavour a wide variety of dishes, including chicken, lamb, pork, potatoes, vegetables and soups. Choose a warm, frost-free area as this Mediterranean native is not frost hardy. Ideally it should be grown against a well-drained, south-facing wall away from strong winds. The variety 'Arp' is a bit hardier than most and can be grown in the garden with little winter protection. Another solution is to grow your Rosemary in a container and bring it into a bright, cool protected place during the winter.

SAGE

This herb is synonymous with poultry stuffings, but is also used sparingly to flavour rich meats and stews. Many people believe you can ward off a sore throat by drinking a cup of sage tea. An easy plant to grow in a sunny border, the soft grey green leaves are attractive in any garden. Bees and hummingbirds are attracted to the spiked purple flowers. Prune back to 15 cm in early spring to promote a compact growth habit.

TARRAGON

Tarragon is a popular culinary herb, most notably in French cuisine. Probably best known for flavouring vinegar, but it's also great to spice up salads, meats, vegetables, sauces, mayonnaise, cheese, and omelettes. It also helps to take the fishy taste out of fish. Plant in well drained soil, it prefers full sun but does well in part shade. Look for the true French tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus* var. *sativa*). The seed-grown Russian tarragon does not have the same intense flavour, or culinary value. Best used fresh, just snip off a piece whenever needed. It is also a good herb to freeze and use later, the best time to do this is in July or early August.

THYME

With its subtle, dry aroma, and slightly minty flavour, thyme is one of the most useful herbs for the kitchen and so deserves a place in all gardens. Often included in seasoning blends for poultry, lamb, veal or stuffing, it can also be used in fish sauces, chowders, soups, blended into spaghetti or pizza sauce, and chilli. It is a low-growing, compact, easy to grow ground cover with attractive pungent foliage with dense clusters of long-lasting flowers. Like other members of the mint family, thyme comes in many flavours and scents. Plant in full sun with well-drained soil. Well suited to the rock garden or the front of a border. A neat trick is to plant it between paving stones, that way as you walk on it the scent is released.

HERBS IN CONTAINERS

Herbs grow very well in pots, and nothing beats a pot full of them just outside your kitchen door. Plant a few of your favourite herbs in container, they're guaranteed to look fabulous wherever you place them. Plant a strawberry pot full of herbs and take advantage of their rich diversity of foliage and flowers. Or perhaps create a moss hanging basket stuffed with your favourite flavourings. Find a favourite container and plant it up to your liking.

ANNUAL HERBS

The following herbs are annuals, so they must be re-planted each year; however, some will seed themselves:

- Anise
- Basil
- Borage
- Chervil
- Coriander (or cilantro)
- Dill
- Sweet marjoram
- Summer savory

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BIENNIAL HERBS

These are plants that form leaves in their first year, then flower and produce seed and then die in their second year. The good news is they often reseed themselves:

Parsley
Caraway

SHRUB-LIKE HERBS

These herbs are more like shrubs because they form woody stems at the base:

Bay
Lavender
Rosemary
Sage

PERENNIAL HERBS

The following herbs are perennials. They live from year to year, although some are herbaceous, meaning the foliage withers in the fall.

French sorrel
French tarragon
Mint
Oregano
Rue
Salvia
Sweet woodruff
Thyme
Watercress
Welsh onion
Winter savory
Wormwood