

**Herbs: Garden to Table**

**Presented by JoAnn Weaver, University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Crow Wing County**

**<www.extension.umn.edu/garden>**

**Herbs are often defined as plants with leaves, seeds, or flowers that are used for flavoring, food, fragrance, or medicine. Most herbs are easy to grow and they are relatively pest free. They enhance a garden with color, texture, and form. Generally speaking, they don’t like to be planted in overly rich soil, over fertilized, or overwatered. Do not try to make your garden match the growing conditions of the plants you like. Instead choose plants to match your garden conditions.**

**Herbs can be happy in many places:**

* **First and foremost: plant herbs close to where you will ultimately use them**
* **Herb garden – full sun (6- 8 hours per day) or partial shade**
* **Container garden – small, low-growing unless in a big pot**
* **Window boxes – combination with upright and cascading**
* **Mixed perennial border – try lavender, dill, sage, and/or chives**
* **Edging – experiment with parsley, basil, and chives**
* **Ground covers and between stepping stones – thymes work well**
* **Check your hardiness zone – it can be difficult to over-winter herbs in this climate. Containers exposed to temperature fluctuations and extreme cold provide very little insulation**

**The cook’s patio often features a selection of these common herbs:**

* **Basil – many varieties, excellent in salads and for making pesto**
* **Chives – salads, omelets, sprinkled on top of cooked dishes**
* **Dill – fish, salads, breads, cheese dishes, and pickles**
* **French Tarragon – salads, sauces, in fresh butter to spread on corn**
* **Lavender – cookies, scones, cakes, honey, and ice cream**
* **Lemon Balm – infuse the leaves in salad dressings or tea. Not the best in cooking**
* **Lemon Verbena – flavor sugar, honey, beverages, or on fresh fruit**
* **Mint – lamb, teas, herbal cocktails, and desserts**
* **Oregano – soups, butter sauces, tomato dishes, pizza, and fish**
* **Parsley – salads, sauces, casseroles, soups, salsas, and vegetable dishes**
* **Rose – jams, jellies, candied rose petal garnishes**
* **Rosemary – grilled vegetables, baked potatoes, and homemade bread**
* **Sage – stuffing, squash, apples, and pears**
* **Thyme – grilled cheese, baked potatoes, roasted vegetables, and soups**

**Finding plants:**

* **Seeds most inexpensive**
* **Herbs to start from seed: Arugula, Basil, Caraway, Chervil, Dill, Marigold, Parsley, Nasturtium**
* **Cuttings – a great way to start plants that don’t produce seeds or come true from seeds**
* **Herbs to propagate from cuttings: Lemon Verbena, Mint, Oregano/Marjoram, Rosemary, Scented Geranium, Tarragon**
* **Division the easiest way to propagate plants**
* **Herbs to propagate by division: Bee Balm, Catmint, Chamomile, Lovage, Tarragon**

**Which pot to choose?**

* **Avoid tall, skinny pots that become unstable with tall, skinny plants**
* **Terra -cotta “breathes,” allowing air to reach the plant roots**
* **Evaporating moisture from a terra-cotta pot allows plant roots to cool**
* **Before planting, soak the pot in water so it doesn’t “wick” water away from roots**
* **Glazed terra-cotta/ceramic containers add color but they don’t breathe as do unglazed pots**
* **Drainage hole a necessity**
* **Wooden containers eventually rot. Avoid creosote and other preservatives harmful to plants**
* **Other choices include metal, cast-iron, fiberglass, wire, and plastic**
* **Don’t ruin a family heirloom for the sake of one summer**
* **Consider whether the planter will be charming vs. “tacky”**

**Additional supplies:**

* **Trowel/Small border spade**
* **Good cutting tools**
* **Watering accessories: watering can, hose, “water breaker.” Behind every great pot/garden is a gardener – with a hose**

**Time to plant:**

* **Ideal soil includes loam, water, and air**
* **Place like-minded plants in the same container**
* **Herbs for dry soil: Catnip, Chives, Curry, Lemon Balm, Thyme**
* **Herbs for moist soil: Chervil, Dill, Fennel, Lemongrass, Oregano/Marjoram**
* **Plant close together or select a pot that’s not overly large for individual specimens**
* **Don’t place “other” material in the pots to fill space or impede drainage**
* **All plants need some sunshine, water, air – fertilize sparingly**
* **Herbs for full sun: Basil, Borage, Calendula, Dill, Rose, Sage, Thyme**
* **Herbs for partial shade: Lemon Balm, Lovage, Mint, Parsley, Sweet Woodruff**
* **Some plants can grow in the same container/same soil for years with just the addition of fresh compost**

**Staying healthy:**

* **The key – avoid plant stress. Most pests and disease are opportunistic**
* **Inspect plants frequently**
* **Water very useful in dislodging many of the common pests**
* **Avoid the use of insecticides**
* **Herbs grown indoors require at least five hours of sunlight**
* **Moving the plants outdoors in the warmer months will promote growth**

**Deadheading (the removal of flowers once they are finished blooming):**

* **Keeps the plant looking tidy**
* **Keeps the plant from spreading seed**
* **Often prolongs blooming**
* **Promotes air circulation**
* **May encourage new growth**
* **Helps prevent pest and disease problems**
* **To prune – pinch by hand, snip off with a hand pruner, or use garden shears**

**Harvesting:**

* **Harvest early in the day when the aromatic, volatile oils are strongest**
* **Harvest when dry as excess moisture reduces flavor and encourages mold to form**
* **To encourage healthy leaf growth, remove flower buds as they appear**
* **Cut sprigs, not just leaves, or you will end up with a stripped plant and no new growth**
* **Snip from all over the plant so it evens out with new growth**
* **Wash, dry (use a salad spinner), then use, or store.**
* **Place fresh herbs in a glass with a few inches of water – use within a couple of days**

**Save your herbs to use later:**

* **Freeze chopped dill, parsley, and chives in small plastic bags**
* **Infuse olive oil with rosemary or basil**
* **Mix chopped herbs with softened butter and freeze in airtight containers**
* **Make basil, sage, parsley, or rosemary pesto**
* **Dry mint and steep for a calming tea**
* **Dry whole thyme leaves and grind them for use later**
* **Dry herbs of choice in sea salt. When they are dry, pulverize the herbs in a coffee grinder (reserved for this use only – not grinding coffee beans). Add dried lemon peel, if desired, and then remix with the salt. For a finer blend, grind the salt and herbs together**
* **Herbs can be preserved in honey, use small amounts of both. Drizzle in tea and over soft cheese as an appetizer**

**In the kitchen:**

* **Sage, thyme, oregano, and rosemary retain their flavor when dried. Use half the volume and add closer to the beginning of cooking so the flavor has a chance to develop**
* **Delicate herbs (parsley, chives, cilantro, basil) replace with another herb or leave out as dried form rather tasteless**
* **Dried tarragon, mint, and dill have a distinct flavor, use half the volume**
* **Store away from heat and light. If they have no fragrance, replace them**

**Marinated Tomatoes**

**8 firm, ripe, tomatoes**

**1 clove garlic, crushed**

**½ cup salad oil**

**½ cup chopped parsley**

**½ tsp. black pepper**

**¼ cup tarragon**

**2 tsp. sugar**

**4 heaping tsp. prepared mustard**

**2 tsp. salt**

**Slice tomatoes and place in a shallow pan. In a small bowl combine remaining ingredients. Pour over tomatoes. Let stand at room temperature for 20 – 30 minutes. Serve.**

**Herb – Encrusted Goat Cheese**

**2 T. finely chopped fresh chives**

**2 T. finely chopped fresh parsley**

**2 T. finely chopped fresh lemon thyme**

**4 – 5 oz. softened goat cheese**

**In a small bowl, combine the herbs. Divide the goat cheese into three balls. Roll each ball in the herb mixture, pressing to set the herbs. Serve as an appetizer with crackers of choice.**

**Lemon Tea Bread**

**¾ cup milk**

**1 T. finely chopped Lemon Balm**

**1 T. finely chopped Lemon Thyme**

**2 cups all-purpose flour**

**1 ½ teaspoons baking powder**

**¼ teaspoon salt**

**6 T. butter (at room temperature)**

**1 cup sugar**

**2 eggs, beaten**

**1 T. grated lemon zest**

**Grease a 9 X 5 loaf pan. Pre-heat the oven to 325 degrees. Heat the milk with the chopped herbs and let steep until cool. Mix flour, baking powder, and salt in a small bowl. In another larger bowl, cream the butter and gradually beat in the sugar. Continue beating until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs, one at a time. Beat in the lemon zest. Add the flour mixture alternately with the herbed milk. Mix until batter is just blended. Place the batter in a prepared pan and bake approximately 50 minutes (until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out dry). Remove bread to a wire rack set over waxed paper. Pour lemon glaze over the top of the still warm bread. Decorate with a few sprigs of lemon thyme.**

**Lemon Glaze**

**Combine the juice of two lemons with confectioner’s sugar. Mixture should be thick but pourable**