

Grow an HERB GARDEN – in a POT

We all have an old container of some sort, hidden away in a garage or basement that would be an IDEAL home for a new HERB GARDEN!!

Be sure there is a hole in the bottom for proper drainage!! You can use a collection of smaller pots, a single large pot, or a small raised bed garden. You decide!



Having your own herb garden is a summer joy that can be both fragrant and functional! There's nothing better than fresh herbs to perk up even the most bland meal, but not everyone has room for a large garden. Luckily, most herbs do very well when grown together in containers. Whether you use a small container for a few herbs, a large container for more selection, or dedicate a sunny corner in the yard for a small raised garden frame from the hardware store, you can have all the fresh herbs you want to enhance your summer cooking!

Consider plant height when selecting herbs to grow together in a pot. Tall herbs, like fennel or tarragon, will look out of scale in a small pot, and may even become top heavy, causing the container to fall over. If possible, mix in some trailing herbs to cascade over the container edges like thyme or oregano. Be sure to choose plants with common water needs when mixing herbs in a pot. While almost all herbs love sun, some have more water requirements than others. Rosemary, thyme, and sage like it fairly dry, but basil and parsley need more consistent moisture. If you want to plant mint, beware! Most mint will grow rampantly, taking over the container, and should it get loose, your yard!!

What herbs will grow in one pot? Quite a few culinary herbs from the Mediterranean that share a love for sun and the need for fairly dry, arid soil. Examples include: sage, rosemary, marjoram, French tarragon, oregano and lavender.

Fresh herbs are excellent additions to your culinary repertoire!

Classic herb combinations to try in your yard:

- **for full sun:** basil, rosemary, sage, oregano, dill, chamomile, fennel, thyme and lavender
- **for part shade:** parsley, cilantro, chives, thyme, tarragon, lemon balm, chervil, sorrel
- **for Mediterranean dishes:** rosemary, basil, oregano, sage, thyme and lavender
- **for Mexican dishes:** cilantro, oregano, cumin, mint, parsley and chile peppers
- **for Indian dishes:** holy basil, mint, curry, mustard, fennel, coriander and dill.
- **for Tea Gardens:** mint, chamomile, lemon verbena, lemon balm, stevia, lavender, rosemary and sage
- **for Cocktail Gardens:** mint, rosemary, basil, sage and lavender
- **for Salad Gardens:** spinach, arugula, lettuce, Mizuna, celery, sorrel, bok choy, watercress, nasturtiums

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HINT: If you have a really large, tall pot, add a few water-filled plastic water/soda bottles with tops on at the bottom to add weight. Add another layer of air-filled bottles over that if needed. Put in a 4-sheet layer of newspaper and about 12" of soil on top of the paper, then add the herbs and fill soil around them. The bottles will reduce the amount of soil

required for the pot, while the water-filled bottles add weight to the bottom to keep the planter from tipping over easily. I have a large, spare paving stone that fits in the bottom of my pot that keeps it steady in the yard.

RAISED GARDEN BED: A key value in investing in a more permanent garden is that many commonly used herbs will come back, year after year in our Edgebrook area. Good candidates for this are thyme (both lemon and german), oregano, marjoram, French tarragon, and chives. Parsley is less reliable, but frequently regrows for a year or two. Add to that, annuals such as rosemary and basil plants, and you can take your cooking to a new level!! If you have a smaller container that you can take indoors in the winter, you can have rosemary for the next year as well.

If you have a sunny, hot corner in your yard, front or back, you can plant a raised garden or use decorative pots to grow those tasty summer herbs!

Buy a precut raised-garden frame at a local hardware store or Nursery. They come in a variety of sizes. Add raised garden bed soil, and herbs and you are ready to go! Do not forget to water regularly to keep the plants healthy and producing herbs all summer long.

Photo: local front garden: greek oregano, rosemary, chives, tarragon, and thyme



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FREEZING HERBS: The best way to ensure you will have herbs available to cook year-round is to freeze them! Unlike drying herbs, freezing preserves more of the flavor of the fresh version. Preserving herbs in the freezer is a great way to keep your kitchen stocked with flavor that's always ready to use!

1. **Freeze fresh herbs in an ice cube tray.** The ice cube tray method works best for tender herbs, such as cilantro or parsley, which have delicate, thin leaves. After removing the herbs from the stems, wash and gently dry them using a paper towel to rid of excess moisture. (You can chop some herbs, such as lemongrass and chives, before freezing to cut down on prep time for later recipes.) Then, gently pack the herbs into the ice cube tray, cover them with water, and place them in the freezer for a few hours. If you use boiling water, the cubes will remain clear. Once the cubes are completely frozen, place the cubes in a plastic bag and store for up to a year.
2. **Freezing whole herbs:** Lay your herbs in a single layer on baking or cookie sheets. Be sure the herbs are flat and evenly spaced. After approximately forty minutes in the freezer, place the herbs in labeled airtight containers or freezer bags for longer-term storage. When adding herbs to plastic bags, be sure to press out all of the excess air. Flash freezing is an especially good technique for hardier herbs, such as bay or rosemary, which can be frozen on the stem as whole sprigs.
3. **Frozen purée:** This technique involves the extra step of processing the herbs before freezing them. It's an especially good choice for basil, with its large, delicate, shiny green leaves. Pesto, a popular herb-based dish, can be made in advance and frozen, either in an amount sufficient for a whole meal or as smaller units. Purée the basil along with olive oil, garlic, and pecorino cheese in a food processor. Then, put the pesto in containers and place it in the freezer.

Hint: Whichever herb freezing method you choose, add olive oil to the herbs before freezing. Coating the herbs adds an additional level of protection, especially against freezer burn. The oil will also enhance the dish the herbs are added to. This is great for sautéing or adding to soup.

Frozen herbs are great to have in your kitchen, as you can use them to substitute fresh herbs in most recipes. When making hot foods, such as soups, stews, and sauces, you can add frozen herbs to the recipe without thawing. Freezing herbs can affect their color and texture, so stick with fresh herbs as garnishes.