



# Herbs

Herbs are plants that are used as flavoring agents. Herbs used in cooking are called “culinary” herbs. Mild or savory herbs impart a delicate flavor to foods, while stronger or pungent herbs add zest. A number of additional herbs are used for medicinal, aromatic, or ornamental purposes. This section focuses on the culinary herbs. These herbs are attractive and varied, giving them ornamental value as well.

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Herb gardening is becoming popular throughout Kansas. Enthusiasm for natural foods has heightened this interest. Most food recipes can be accentuated and livened with proper use of culinary herbs.

The leaves of most herbs are the part of the plant that is used, although seeds or roots of some herbs also can be used. Herbs are used in small quantities, and usually only a few plants are needed to provide sufficient fresh and dried herbs for an entire season.

## Location

The ornamental value of herbs makes them useful in flower beds, borders, rock gardens, and corner plantings. Some herbs are annuals, while others are perennial and come up year after year. You can plant annual herbs in your annual flower or vegetable garden. Perennial herbs should be located at the edge of the garden where they won't interfere with next year's soil preparation.

Many gardeners establish a small herb garden near the back door. Generally, a 6- to 10-foot square or rectangular area is sufficient, but you also can use circular or free-form

designs. This guide provides information for proper spacing. Locate the tallest herbs at the back of the plot.

## Care

Care for the herb garden will be similar to that of a vegetable or flower garden. Select a sunny well-drained location, apply a balanced fertilizer, but avoid excessive use of nitrogen fertilizers. Consult the Soil Improvement section of this guide for soil preparation, fertilization, and other garden cultural practices.

Water as necessary during dry periods. Generally, you will need about an inch of water per week, if not supplied by natural rainfall. A mulch will help conserve soil moisture and reduce weed growth as well. The mints prefer moist soil and require more frequent watering.

## Getting Started

Annual and biennial herbs can be established by planting the seed directly in the garden or starting seed indoors for transplanting to the garden. You can save seed produced by the herb plants for next year's crop or obtain

seed from your local garden center or seed catalog.

To save your own seed, harvest the entire seed head after it has dried on the plant. The seeds should be allowed to dry in a protected location that is cool and dry. After the seeds are thoroughly dry, thresh the seed from the seed heads and discard the trash. Store in labeled jars in a dark, cool, dry location.

Some herb seeds such as dill, anise, caraway, and coriander can be used for flavoring.

Perennial herbs can be propagated by cuttings or division. Divide plants every 3–4 years in the early spring. The plants should be dug up and cut into several sections. You can also cut 4- to 6-inch sections of the stem and root them by placing the cuttings in moist sand in a shady area. In 4–8 weeks, roots should form. Herbs such as sage, winter savory, and thyme can be propagated by cuttings. Chives, lovage, and tarragon can be propagated by division of the roots or crowns. Apple mint forms runners or stems that run along the ground and can easily be propagated by covering a portion of the runner and allowing it to form roots.

## Harvesting

Leaves of many herbs such as parsley and chives can be harvested for fresh seasonings. You can gradually remove some of the leaves as you need them, but don't remove all the foliage at one time. These plants will produce over a long period of time if they are well cared for.

Chervil and parsley leaves can be cut and dried any time. Lovage leaves should be harvested early during the first flush of growth.

On rosemary and thyme, clip the tops when the plants are in full bloom. Usually leaves and flowers are harvested together. Basil, fennel,

mint, sage, summer savory, sweet marjoram, tarragon, and winter savory are harvested just before the plants start to bloom.

## Drying

After harvesting, hang herbs in loosely tied bundles in a well-ventilated room. You can also spread the branches on a screen, cheesecloth, or hardware cloth. For herbs where leaves only are needed, the leaves can be spread on flat trays. Keep dust off the herbs with a cloth or similar protective cover that allows moisture to pass through.

It is generally best to dry naturally in a cool, dark room rather than to use artificial heat. This can be done commercially, but you may lose flavor and quality by attempting to use artificial heat.

## Storage

When herbs are thoroughly dry, they should be put in airtight containers such as sealed fruit jars and stored in a cool dark location. Any sign of moisture accumulating in the jars indicates the herbs are not thoroughly dry. Flower stalks should be pulverized before putting them in the jars, but foliage herbs can be stored either pulverized or as whole leaves, depending on their intended use.

## Herbs in Containers

Some herbs can be placed in pots and grown indoors during the winter. They should be placed in a sunny south window and given care similar to house plants. Herbs can either be dug up toward the end of the growing season and placed in pots or started from seed indoors.

## Annual Herbs

Herb	Height (In.)	Description	Culture	Harvest	Use
<b>Anise</b> <i>Pimpinella anisum</i>	20-24	Serrated leaves; small, white flowers. Low spreading plant is a slow-growing annual.	Moderately rich soil. Likes full sun. Space 6-8 inches in rows 12-14 inches apart.	When seeds turn brown or use leaves while green.	<i>Seed</i> —pastries, candy, cookies, beverages, meat, soups. <i>Leaves</i> —salad or garnish.
<b>Basil</b> <i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	20-24	Leafy, light-green foliage; white or lavender flowers. Fast-growing annual.	Start seed indoors in early April or seed in early spring. Space 12 inches. Prefers protected sunny location.	Harvest leaves just before flowering begins. Cut plants 4-6 inches above ground.	<i>Leaves</i> —soups, stews, omelets, salads, meats, sauces.
<b>Borage</b> <i>Borago officinalis</i>	20-24	Coarse, rough, hairy leaves; light-blue flowers in drooping clusters.	Seed directly in early spring. Space 12 inches apart. Seeds may be slow to germinate.	Harvest the young leaves and dry, or cook fresh like spinach.	<i>Leaves</i> —salads, greens <i>Flowers and leaf tips</i> —pickles, soups.
<b>Caraway</b> <i>Carum cervi</i> -biennial-	12-24	Carrotlike leaf, small, creamy-white flowers.	Seed directly in spring, locate in full sun. Space 6 inches.	Harvest leaves when mature. Seeds will form midway through second season.	<i>Leaves</i> —garnish <i>Seeds</i> —breads, cakes, soups, sauces, salads.
<b>Chervil</b> <i>Anthriscus cerefolium</i>	18	Similar to parsley; light-green, lacy leaves. Flowers are small, white clusters.	Sow seed in moist, partially shaded location. Space 6 inches.	Harvest mature leaves and dry or use fresh for garnishes.	<i>Leaves</i> —salads, soup, meat, poultry, garnishes.
<b>Coriander</b> <i>Coriandrum sativum</i>	36	Large, coarse plant; white flowers. Also known as cilantro or Mexican parsley.	Sow seeds in full sun, thin to 10 inches.	Harvest seeds when they begin to turn brown. Seeds are generally used crushed.	<i>Seeds</i> —pastries, sauces, pickles, liquors.
<b>Dill</b> <i>Anthum graveolens</i>	24-36	Tall plant with feathery, green leaves; open, umbrella-shaped flower heads.	Seed directly and thin to 12 inches. If seeds mature and fall, they come up again next year.	Harvest mature seed before it drops. May use small leaves as well.	<i>Sprigs of seed head</i> —pickles, sauces, meats, salads, vinegar.
<b>Fennel</b> <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	36	Fine, feathery leaves with broad, bulblike leaf base.	Sow in early spring and thin to 12 inches.	Harvest either young sprigs and leaves or seeds.	<i>Sprigs</i> —soups. <i>Leaves</i> —garnishes. <i>Seeds</i> —soups, breads.
<b>Parsley</b> <i>Petroselinum crispum</i>	5-6	Curled or plain dark-green leaves.	Seed in early spring. Space 6-8 inches. May be slow to germinate.	Harvest mature leaves as needed.	<i>Leaves</i> —garnishes.
<b>Sweet Marjoram</b> <i>Majorana hortensis</i>	12	Fine-textured plant; white flowers.	Start seedlings in shade. Mature plants prefer full sun. Space 8-10 inches.	Harvest mature leaves.	<i>Leaves</i> —salads, soups, dressings.
<b>Summer Savory</b> <i>Satureja hortensis</i>	18	Small gray-green leaves with purple and white flowers.	A tender annual; plant after danger of frost. Space 6-9 inches.	Harvest mature leaves.	<i>Leaves</i> —salads, soups, dressings, poultry.

## Perennial Herbs

Herb	Height (In.)	Description	Culture	Harvest	Use
<b>Chives</b> <i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>	12	Onion-type leaves; round, purple flower head.	Can be grown in containers or outdoors in spring. Divide to increase. Space 5 inches.	Clip leaves as needed.	<i>Leaves</i> —omelets, salads, soups, sauces, dips.
<b>Garlic Chives</b> <i>Allium tuberosum</i>	12-16	Similar to chives.	Same as chives.	Same as chives.	Substitute for garlic flavor.
<b>Peppermint</b> <i>Mentha piperita</i>	18	Vigorous bush-type plant; purple flowers.	Prefers rich, moist soil. Space 8-10 inches.	Harvest young or mature leaves.	<i>Leaves</i> —soups, sauces, teas, jelly. <i>Sprigs</i> —teas, sauces, summer drinks.
<b>Spearmint</b> <i>Mentha spicata</i>	18	Pointed, crinkled leaves.	Same as peppermint.	Same as peppermint.	<i>Leaves</i> —summer drinks, teas, mints, sauces.
<b>Lemon Balm</b> <i>Melissa officinalis</i>	24	Crinkled, dull-green leaves; white blossoms. Vigorous grower.	Space 12 inches. Prefers full sun.	Harvest mature leaves.	<i>Leaves</i> —soups, meats, teas, summer drinks.
<b>Lovage</b> <i>Levisticum officinale</i>	24-36	Grows quite tall.	May start indoors and move to sunny location. Space 12-15 inches.	Harvest mature leaves.	Substitute for celery flavor.
<b>Oregano</b> <i>Origanum vulgare</i>	24	Choose English strains. Produces pink flowers.	Plant in rich soil. Space 8-10 inches. Start in protected location and move to full sun.	Harvest mature leaves.	<i>Leaves</i> —soups, roasts, stews, salads.
<b>Rosemary</b> <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	36	Dark-green foliage; small, blue flowers.	Start cutting in early spring. Space 24 inches.	Harvest mature leaves.	<i>Leaves and sprigs</i> —meats, sauces, soups. <i>Dried leaves</i> —sachets to hang in closet with garments.
<b>Sage</b> <i>Salvia officinalis</i>	16	Shrublike plant with gray leaves; purple flowers.	Plant in well-drained location. Space 30 inches.	Harvest leaves before flowering.	<i>Leaves</i> —meats, teas, fish, dressings, stews.
<b>Tarragon</b> <i>Artemisa dracunculul</i>	24	Select French tarragon. Fine, dark-green leaves.	Prefers well-drained soil. Space 12 inches.	Harvest mature leaves or sprigs.	<i>Leaves</i> —salads, sauces, eggs, fish, vegetables, chicken, salad vinegar.
<b>Thyme</b> <i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	8-12	Narrow, dark-green leaves.	Start seeds indoors. Prefers full sun and well-drained soil. Space 10-12 inches.	Harvest leaves and flower clusters before first flowers open.	<i>Leaves</i> —soups, salads, dressings, omelets, gravy, breads, vegetables.