

**Diversified  
Greg Gruben  
Fall is for Herbs**

Herbs are plants that are used as flavoring in foods. The common herbs used in cooking are referred to as culinary herbs. Mild or savory herbs impart a delicate flavor to food, while the stronger or pungent herbs add zest. Herbs are also planted for their ornamental value.

**Planting and propagation**

Select a sunny, well-drained location. At planting, apply a slow-release fertilizer at the rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet. Herbs can be annuals (live only one season) or perennials (grow back from their root systems each year). Annual herbs can be planted in an annual flower garden or vegetable garden. Be sure to plant perennial herbs at the side of the garden where they won't interfere with next year's soil preparation.

Some herbs can be established by planting the seed directly in the garden or by starting seed indoors for later transplanting to the garden. You can obtain seed from a local garden center or seed catalog, or save the seeds produced by the herb plants for next year's crop. To save your own seeds, harvest the entire seed head after it has dried on the plant. Then allow the seeds to dry in a protected location that is cool and dry. After the seeds are thoroughly dry, separate them from the seed heads and discard the trash. Store the seeds in sealed, labeled jars in a dark, cool, dry location. Some herb seeds such as dill, anise, caraway, or coriander can be used for flavorings. Perennial herbs can be propagated by cuttings or by division. Herbs such as sage and thyme can be propagated by cuttings. Chives can be propagated by dividing the roots or crowns.

Divide the plants every 3 to 4 years in the early spring. Dig them up and cut them into several sections. Or, cut 4- to 6-inch sections of the stem and place the cuttings in moist sand in a shady area. In 4 to 8 weeks, roots should form on these cuttings. Care for the herb garden is the same as for a vegetable or flower garden.

**Watering**

Be sure to water as necessary during dry periods. Generally, herbs need about 1 inch of water per week, either from rainfall or from irrigation. Mulch will help conserve soil moisture as well as reduce weed growth. Because mints prefer moist soil, they must be watered more often.

**Harvesting**

The leaves of many herbs, such as parsley and chives, can be harvested for fresh seasonings. Gradually remove a few leaves from the plants as you need them. Don't remove all the foliage at one time. With proper care, these plants will produce over a long period. To harvest rosemary and thyme, clip the tops when the plants are in full bloom. The leaves and flowers are usually harvested together. Basil, mint, sage, and sweet marjoram are harvested just before the plant starts to bloom. Parsley leaves can be cut and dried anytime.

**Drying**

After harvest, hang the herbs in loosely tied bundles in a well-ventilated room. You can also spread the branches on a screen, cheesecloth, or hardware cloth. Spread the leaves on flat trays. Cover the herbs with a cloth that will keep dust off but allow moisture to pass through. Many of the herbs we grow today are from the Mediterranean region, so hot, dry summer weather suits them perfectly. Herbs need good drainage (they do best in a raised bed) and the right exposure. Most require full sun. Mints and a few other herbs grow well in shade or partial shade.

**To be Continued...For herbs that grow well in Texas: see next week's article "Best Herbs for Texas".**

Source: Fall Vegetable Gardening Guide, Larry Stein, Joe Masabni, Jerry Parsons, Texas A&M Extension Horticulturists

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