

Herbs **Fragrant, Tasty, and Beautiful — plant them outdoors or indoors**

Patches of garden that seem to sprout nothing but weeds should not be written off. “If you can’t grow anything else,” says gardening and food writer Sally Freeman, “herbs are the answer.” Herbs have a long, noble history. They’ve been used to flavor food, prepare medicinal brews, beautify gardens — even line the pockets of merchants, as they tried to fill the demand for herbs and spices during the Middle Ages.

Growing herbs isn’t difficult, as Freeman, author of *Herbs for All Seasons* (Penguin, 1991) and *Every Woman’s Guide to Natural Home Remedies* (Holt, 1997), explains here.

Essentials For An Herb Garden:

Ideally, there are three essentials for an herb garden: good drainage, plenty of sunlight, and light soil enriched with compost. Try to keep your garden away from trees; the roots rob soil of moisture and nutrients.

But many herbs will do well without all three. Rosemary doesn’t mind some shade. Basil, fennel, dill, Italian parsley, and chives do well in soil suitable for growing vegetables. Peppermint doesn’t mind wet conditions. Thyme tolerates acid soil, while lavender requires more alkalinity than most herbs.

Indoor Herb Gardens:

If your windows face south, you should have adequate light for even sun-loving herbs, such as dill, coriander, oregano, thyme, and marjoram. If your windows face in other directions, you should be able to grow rosemary, sweet woodruff, or bay laurel in natural light. You may have to augment natural light with special lighting.

Be sure to place herb containers as far as possible from radiators and other heating appliances, in a room that is cool, moist, and well ventilated. On very cold winter days they should be placed away from windows.

Growing From Seed:

Most herbs will grow easily from seed, germinating in five to seven days. There are exceptions. Lavender can take up to a month to germinate. Rosemary is best propagated by cuttings, and French tarragon, which is more flavorful than the Russian variety and preferable for cooking, must be propagated by root division. Parsley can be very difficult to germinate. Italian parsley is easier to grow than regular parsley, and, to my mind, tastes better.

Fertilizer of Choice:

Compost is best because it won’t burn the tender roots. Enrich your compost pile by including some weeds, especially dandelion, whose long roots bring up minerals from deep in the soil. A layer of mulch conserves moisture and suppresses weeds in the summer.

Watering Herbs:

Water herbs as soon as the soil feels dry. Rosemary, especially, should never be allowed to dry out. You may need to water every day. Your herbs will also appreciate a daily misting.