

Community Horticulture Fact Sheet #21 Herbs

Most herbs are easy to grow in western Washington. They prefer a light, well-drained soil. In fact, many herbs seem to grow best in poor, droughty soils and may do poorly in rich soils or with too much moisture.

Soil preparation for an herb garden is not very different from a vegetable garden. Adding 5 to 10 pounds of dolomite lime per 100 square feet will help to raise the acid pH's we normally have in our area. Moderate amounts of a general garden fertilizer (such as a 5-10-10) in sandy soils should satisfy the modest mineral needs of most herbs. Two to 3 pounds per 100 square feet should be about right.

Fine-textured soils which have better fertility may not need any pre-plant fertilizer, although it pays to watch the new plants for "hunger signs." Most herbs will not do well in poorly drained, clay soils. If you have a heavy soil, improve the drainage and tilth with lots of organic matter prior to planting.

As with a vegetable garden, herbs generally need a minimum of 6 hours of sun a day. There are, however, some herbs like parsley and mint that seem able to adapt to part shade. Once perennial herbs are established and mulched with bark or sawdust, they will rarely need watering.

If you don't want to buy transplants of herbs, they can be started indoors in a

south-facing window or under fluorescent lights. Many herbs may also be seeded directly into the garden; simply follow the directions on the seed pack.

Herbs can be grown in a garden by themselves or they can be mixed in with other annuals, perennials or shrubs. (When mixing culinary herbs with ornamentals, be sure to avoid using pesticides on the ornamentals that are not also labeled for edibles.) In the vegetable garden they make good companions, since their distinctive tastes and smells may confuse the garden bugs. Herbs also adapt well to container growing. Quite a variety can be grown in one window box or half whiskey barrel. Containers also have the advantage that they can be moved indoors in the fall to extend the season.

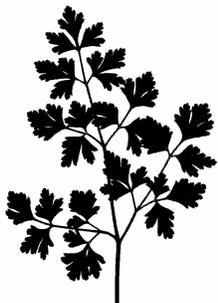
Here are notes about seven popular herbs:

BASIL is an annual herb with broad, shiny, aromatic leaves. Basil likes a warm, sunny location and rich garden soil. After the danger of frost has passed, transplant seedlings started indoors or sow directly into the garden. Thin seedlings to about 15 inches apart. Keep



spikes of white flowers pinched out. Harvest individual leaves or shoots as needed. Hang plant bunches in a dark, cool place to dry for winter use, or make into pesto and freeze.

PARSLEY, a biennial often grown as an annual, has curly, dark green leaves. Parsley likes full sun or partial shade and well-drained soil. Set out plants in April or sow directly in the garden. Soak parsley seed in warm water before planting. It may take several weeks to sprout. Thin seedlings to 6-8 inches apart. Harvest older leaves as needed. Parsley is hardy and usually can be grown in protected areas during the winter. Parsley is very nutritious and deserves to be eaten, not just used as a garnish.



MINT is a perennial herb with square stems and aromatic leaves. Most mints like partially shady areas and moist soil, but will grow almost anywhere. Propagate mints from stem cuttings and contain in a pot as they are quite invasive. There are a great variety of mints. Pinch stems and leaves and use as needed.

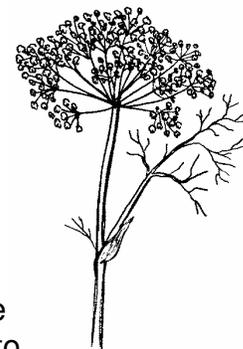


CHIVES, a perennial, has small onion-like leaves and tiny bulbs. Chives enjoy sunny or lightly shaded areas and moist, fairly rich, organic soil. Most chives are propagated from bulb divisions, but they can also be grown from seed. Chives are hardy and will be available for cutting most of the year. Because chives have many purple flowers, they make lovely ornamentals. Like all



culinary herbs, the blossoms can be used as edible flowers.

DILL is an annual that gets tall and bushy with feathery leaves and wide clusters of yellow flowers, both having a strong fragrance. Dill enjoys full sun and well-drained soil. Sow several times during spring, starting as soon as the ground warms up. Thin seedlings to 12 -18 inches apart. Harvest leaves as needed, but before flower buds appear. Harvest seed heads after seeds have turned dark brown. To dry seed heads, hang in bunches in a dark, dry place with paper spread beneath to catch the seed (or in paper bags).



SAGE is a semi-shrubby, hardy perennial with gray-green, aromatic leaves. There are several very ornamental sage cultivars with various-colored leaves. Sage likes sunny areas with dry, well-drained soil. Transplant seedlings 14 - 18 inches apart. Trim sage back in spring for bushier, fuller growth. Pick leaves as needed.



CORIANDER/CILANTRO/CHINESE PARSLEY is an annual with fern-like aromatic foliage and flat clusters of pinkish-white flowers. The plant is usually called cilantro when grown for leaves and coriander when grown for seed. It likes a sunny spot and well-drained soil. Sow when danger of frost has passed and thin to 5-6 inches apart. Harvest leaves as needed. Harvest seeds as soon as they turn beige, because they fall quickly after maturing. Seed heads may be cut and hung to dry like dill.