

Herb Gardening Basics

Meghan Davis, Honey Hollow Herbs

3000 Austinburg Road

Ashtabula, OH 44004

440-992-8362

reesandmeghan@roadrunner.com

Herb Gardening Keys to Success

- You don't need a dedicated herb garden.
- Most culinary herbs require at least 6 hours of sun per day, approximately 1 inch of water per week, and soil with great drainage.
- In general, over fertilization of herbs will result in lush growth but less flavor and aroma.
- When spaced and grown properly, herbs rarely suffer severe disease or insect damage and are unattractive to wildlife.

Herb Gardening in Containers

- Most herbs are easy to grow in containers.
- Containers will need occasional fertilization as watering washes away nutrients.

How to Grow and Harvest Herbs

1. Basil

- Annual plant, remove flowers to continue leaf growth and encourage bushiness.
- Easy to start from seed indoors or outdoors or buy small plants to transplant.
- Sensitive to cold, so seed or transplant when soil is warm, as with tomatoes.
- Leaves often show damage when exposed to temperatures of 50°F or lower.
- Japanese beetles can damage leaves, so hand pick beetles or cover plants.
- To harvest, cut 1/3 to 1/2 of a stem above a set of leaves to encourage the plant to grow side shoots.
- Handle leaves gently when harvesting since leaves bruise easily.

2. Chives

- Perennial plant, easy to divide an existing plant.
- Can be started from seed indoors or outdoors, or small plants can be transplanted. Can reseed aggressively, so be sure to cut off flowers before seeds form.
- To harvest, use the "grab & cut" method. Grab some leaves and cut to within 2 inches of ground.
- To cut off flowers, can cut entire clump to within 2 inches of ground and will quickly get new growth.

3. Cilantro (leaf called cilantro, seed called coriander)

- Annual plant so will stop producing edible leaves when it flowers.
- Easy to start from seed indoors or outdoors or buy small plants to transplant.
- Not easy to grow in heat of summer because it "bolts" (goes to flower) quickly when temperatures rise.
- Grows better in spring and fall. Plant seeds every two weeks for a succession of cilantro.
- Grows in a rosette. To harvest, cut stems to ground from the outside. New stems grow from the center.
- When flowers appear, stop harvesting because leaves don't have the same cilantro taste.

4. Dill

- Annual plant that grows tall and upright. It will not become bushy if stems are cut.
- Valued for its leaves (“dill weed”), flowers, and seeds.
- Easy to start from seed outdoors or buy small plants to transplant. Plant seeds every 2 or 3 weeks for a succession of dill.
- If you allow dill to go to seed, it will re-seed for next year.
- Can be harvested when plants are approximately 6” tall. On young plants, grasp the leaf at the bottom of the stem and gently break off. Take the largest, oldest leaves first.
- As dill matures, a main stem develops. Harvest individual leaves by pulling or cutting leaves off of the main stem from the bottom up.
- Use flower heads in pickle recipes.
- Flowers will develop into seeds. Cut off whole seed head when seeds are dark brown and place in paper bag to dry.

5. Mint

- Perennial plant. 2 main mints: spearmint and peppermint.
- Best tasting mints come from cuttings or division. Though mint seeds are commonly available, mint grown from seeds doesn’t have the sweetest leaves.
- Grows well in partial shade.
- Aggressive plant with roots that can run everywhere if planted in the ground. Can grow in container but needs to be divided often.
- To harvest, cut 1/2 of a stem above a set of leaves to encourage the plant to grow side shoots.
- As mint begins to flower, aggressively prune it. Cut stems almost to the ground by keeping one or two pairs of leaves on each stem. The plant will be rejuvenated and grow more fresh stems and leaves.

6. Parsley

- Two types of parsley: flat leaf (Italian) and curly.
- Biennial plant: 1st year grows only leaves; 2nd year flowers, produces seed, and dies.
- Leaves have bitter taste when flowering so grown “as an annual,” i.e., remove plant after 1st year.
- Can start from seed indoors or outdoors though seeds take a long time to germinate. Buying plants to transplant may be easier.
- Grows in a rosette. To harvest, cut stems to ground from the outside. New stems grow from the center.

7. Rosemary

- Perennial plant, but won’t live through cold winters, so known here as a tender perennial.
- Almost all rosemary plants are from cuttings, so it’s best to buy a small plant to transplant.
- Can grow from seed, but plants are variable. May not grow into a nice form.
- To harvest, cut far enough down the stem so new growth isn’t concentrated at the tips of the stems.

8. Thyme

- Perennial plant with 2 forms: upright (often used in cooking) and creeping.
- Basic cooking thyme is easy to start from seed indoors or buy a small plant to transplant.
- Seeds are tiny! Need multiple seeds in a pot to grow a clump.
- Many cultivars of thyme are propagated only from cuttings and can’t be started from seed.
- To harvest, use the “grab & cut” method. Grab some stems and cut to within 2 inches of ground.