



# HERB GARDENING

## CARING FOR HERBS

Herbs are very easy to grow with only a few basic requirements that need to be met. Most herbs do best in sunny locations. The essential oils, which contribute to flavor and fragrance, are produced in greatest quantities when herbs receive at least 6-8 hours of sunlight per day.

A soil pH of neutral to slightly alkaline is best. Acidic soil can be amended with an application of lime. Well-drained soil is required and poorly drained soil should be avoided or improved with deep cultivation and the addition of organic matter. Once established, herbs

## COMMON GARDEN HERBS

**SWEET BASIL:** Basil grows 1.5 to 2 feet in height, and branches profusely so only a few plants are needed. The clove-like flavor of the leaves and flowers is a delightful addition to all tomato-based recipes, as well as salads, omelettes, and soups.

**CHIVES:** Leaves will grow 6 to 10 inches in length. Attractive light violet flowers appear mid-summer. The leaves may be cut as often as needed for they are rapidly replaced. The fresh leaves, usually chopped, are used to add a mild onion flavor to a variety of dishes.

**CORIANDER:** Coriander will grow 2-3' tall and is grown for both its leaves and lemon flavored seeds. This herb can be used in desserts, soups, stews, bread, stuffing, etc.

prefer a relatively dry soil and require watering only during a fairly severe drought. On the other hand, mint performs best in moist soil. Fertilizer is not necessary except for heavily harvested herbs such as basil, chives, and parsley. **Special note:** too much fertilizer and water will produce lush foliage, but a low oil content.

## HARVESTING

Except where the seeds or roots are wanted, the leaves or tops of most herbs should be harvested while they are still fresh and green, usually before or during full bloom. When cut at this stage, the plants will continue to produce new shoots, thus prolonging the harvest season. Herbs are usually dried by spreading them out thinly on a clean surface in an area with simple ventilation. Drying in the shade rather than the sun will help retain the natural colors and reduce loss of essential oils. Store dried herbs in tight, glass containers, kept away from direct light.

**DILL:** Dill will grow 2-5' in height and is much like wild carrot except the flowers are yellow. The leaves and flowers are used for flavoring soups and fish.

**SWEET FENNEL:** This herb is grown similarly to dill. The base of the plant should be blanched by hilling with soil as it starts enlarging. Harvest the enlarged base when full grown for use in fish sauces as flavoring for soups and stews.

**MARJORAM:** Marjoram will grow about 2 feet tall and will become somewhat bushy so they should be spaced 15-18" apart in rows 2-3' apart. The leaves and flower heads should be harvested pre-bloom or early blooming stage and can be used fresh or dried. Use in seasoning soups, egg dishes, meats, potato dishes, and dressings.

**OREGANO:** Very flavorful and provides a strong aroma. Favorite for Italian dishes, tomato sauce, meat, poultry, stuffing, and vegetables.

**PARSLEY:** Cutting of leaves may begin as soon as the plants are 4-6" tall and may continue until growth stops. Parsley can be used fresh or dried.

**PEPPERMINT OR SPEARMINT:** Leaves can be used dry for flavoring tea, sauces for meat, fruit salads, and cooked apples. Fresh leaves can be used for used drinks.

**ROSEMARY:** The needle-like leaves have a spicy, pine scent used to flavor meats and vegetables.

**SAGE:** Cut leaves before or during the blooming period. Dried sage leaves are a great flavoring for meats, dressings, sausage, and cheese, and can be used to make tea.

**THYME:** The flower heads with 4-6" of the tender tips should be cut at full bloom and dried. Dried thyme can be used for flavoring soups, stews, sauces, chowders, meats, and dressings.