

**Ten Must Grow Culinary Herbs**  
**Russell HS, February 16, 2015**  
**Fran Dennett**

From the beginning of written history almost every culture has recorded the use of herbs both for medicinal and cooking purposes. Many medicines and seasonings in use today had the same use 2000 years ago. I will be concentrating on ten herbs that are used in cooking.

Most of the herbs we grow today are the wild form and are not a hybrid or in an improved form. This means you can collect seeds each year & that seeds will produce the same plant you grew this year. The wild forms are tough, easy to grow, have changed little over the years and usually have the best flavor.

In general, the cultural requirements are a sunny location, & fertile, well-drained soil. There are a few exceptions, mint likes it moist and thyme should not to be crowded.

In zone 5, most herbs are annuals. Sage, chives, tarragon, thyme & garlic are exceptions and can be bought or grown from seed.

### **Location**

Traditionally the kitchen garden is located outside the back door which gives the cook ready access to harvest the herbs for cooking a meal. The wheel design is a century old design is often used. This is probably because the wheel is a symbol of life with the spokes representing the phases of life, so it was only natural to plant things within a wheel shape. Nowadays people buy old wagon wheels to use as a sort of raised bed and as a result, old wagon wheels have become very expensive. If you would like to go with the wheel design, you can improvise by using old bricks or stone to represent the spokes.

Another popular design is the spiral, which uses the vertical space. This can be a more permanent feature in a garden and depending on the gardener can be very attractive. Plants are placed in a spiral with the ones needing the least water at the top and the moisture lovers at the bottom. The advantage of this design is that the herbs are easily accessible. You may need the help of someone who is handy in order to build this design.

### **Harvest**

All culinary herbs are harvested as leaves which are then used fresh or dried (for winter use). The exception is garlic which is harvested as a bulb.

### **Aromatic Herbs**

Chives, mint, parsley, sage, rosemary and garlic have an added benefit of repelling some insects. Others, such as hyssop, lemon balm, dill and thyme are a source of nectar for beneficial insects and food to pollinators.

## Culinary Herbs

### **Basil** *Ocimum basilicum*

- sweet basil is not hardy in the temperate zone and is grown as annual
- 2foot high plant, shiny green leaves
- There are different kinds the but best flavor is with sweet basil
- plant near tomatoes as some say it gives good flavor to tomatoes
- harvest fresh leaves and use in anything containing tomatoes, soups, sauces, salads, omelets, meat, poultry and fish

### **Chives & Garlic Chives**

**Chives** *Allium schoenoprasum* has thin tubular grass-like foliage with clover like pink flowers & has mild onion flavor.

**Garlic chive** *Allium tuberosum* has flat leaves with a fold-like keel, clump-forming, white flowers & has a mild garlic smell & flavor. They re-seed with abandon if not dead-headed.

- both are hardy perennial in zone 5, forms clumps that should be divides every 3-4yrs and cut back to grown in late fall.
- companion plant with carrots & plant among the roses to repel aphids
- cut foliage for using salads, cheese dishes, cream cheese, mashed potatoes, hamburgers, sauces, stir fries: snips excess foliage into a glass jar & freeze for use in the winter. Garlic vinegar: collect 30 blossoms cover with white wine vinegar store dark place for one month strain & decant into gift bottles =great Christmas gift. Chives gives a pink vinegar & garlic chives a white/clear vinegar.

### **Dill** *Anethum graveolens*

- tender annual of the carrot family and native to Asia Minor & Mediterranean
- light blue-green plume-like foliage with blue-green stems, yellow umbrella-like flowers, plant 2-3 feet tall, grown as annual, reseeds easily
- to have a continuous supply through the season reseed every 2 weeks
- harvest fresh leaves just before flowers open & dry slowly in a warm dry place
- highly aromatic, excellent for honey bees & beneficial insects
- not a companion plant for cabbage, tomatoes or carrots (don't know why)
- flavor soups, fish, salads, meat, poultry, omelets potatoes, dill pickles and on cucumber sandwiches
- flower arrangers like it for arrangements

### **Garlic** *Allium sativum*

- oldest known herbal seasoning and has been prescribed for every known ailments
- perennial in zone 5
- single seed cloves are best planted in the September/October (when planting the tulips ) in sunny well-drained soil & harvested the next year when the foliage starts to turn yellow usually in late July (note: do not use Chinese garlic)
- as the bulb matures it divides into cloves with a paper thin protective skin cloves
- separate and use for seasoning and save some for planting
- repels many pest (aphids, whitefly) insects so plant near tomatoes and roses
- use in almost any dish with meat, salads (rub on bowl), bread, soups and sauces
- Paul Pospisil “Any home gardener can grow garlic”.

### **Mint** *Mentha*

- the love/hate herb
- the square stem denotes the mint family & contain many different mints characterized by the common name—peppermint, spearmint, orange, pineapple—all different species.
- most common are peppermint & spearmint.
- most are 18 inches high with white, pink, blueish flower, good for attracting beneficial insects & pollinators
- the big drawback is its tendency to spread, hence the recommendation to grow in a container or with barriers (I grow mine near the foundation on the north side of the house and the lawn mower keeps in a contained area)
- grow in moist rich soil and tolerates partial shade
- leaves are harvested for teas, sauces, chop in salads

### **Oregano** *Origanum vulgare*

- oregano is a mixed up species so when buying it grown, make sure you taste a leaf to see how potent it is (you can be disappointed and end up with a sprawling tasteless herb)
- Greek oregano is supposed to have the best flavor
- marjorum (*Origanum majorana*) is related to oregano, but *O. vulgare* is more intense in flavor
- common oregano is hardy in zone 5 but grows best in average, well-drained limy soil in full sun
- best to pick leaves before it starts to flower

- propagation is easy by seed, root division or cuttings
- keep plant cut back to encourage thick growth
- renew plant every three years when they become woody
- use in salads, dressings, tomato sauces, meatloaf, pizza and soups

### **Parsley** *Petroselinum crispum*

- native to southeast Europe but is now grown world wide
- 1 tbsp of fresh parsley contains a daily requirement of vitamin A & C
- 4 types curly, flat (Italian preferred), hamburg (for its large root) or Japanese parsley is a must in every garden.
- this biennial is green the first year, returns the second year and sets seeds which you use to grow next years parsley supply do this every year for a continuous supply
  - eventually you will have parsley in full leaf (1<sup>st</sup> year) some in seed (2<sup>nd</sup> year) the plants dies after it sets seed
  - pull the root & use it in cooking
  - seed germination is slow & temperamental (up to 2 to 3 weeks)
  - try soaking overnight (may be gelatinous)
  - some plant growers pour boiling water over the row of seed, some say its need pre-chilling
  - then there is patience approach, sow in pot & wait
  - throw on the ground in fall & it germinates in the spring
  - doesn't like transplanting
- plant in partial shade in moist soil, trim to encourage more growth
- interplant in flower beds near tomatoes to deter aphids and white flies
- use in almost anything; soups, sauces, salads, as a tea, and to repel aphids on roses
- eat the garnish on your plate to freshen you breath after eating garlic

### **Sage** *Salvia officinalis*

- a sunny spot and well-drained soil, is needed for this small shrub with blue flowers, the gray-green leaves look great all season long
- cut back by half in early spring but usually needs replacing every 3-4 years as they become too woody
- legend says sage follows the fortunes of the house, dwindling in evil days and reviving when things brighten-up

- I pick a bunch to hang on my cupboard
- leaves used with poultry dishes, stuffing, soups

### **Tarragon** *Artemisia dracunculus*

- buy French tarragon which produce no seeds and is propagated by root cutting
- if it is by seed it is Russian tarragon, not very flavorful and an invasive weed
- the leaves are lance-shaped and undivided
- aromatic scent & taste like licorice
- buy a plant and grow in sun in well-drained average soil
- divide in early spring only if you are sharing or want more plants for yourself
- 18 inches high and may need staking or a peony ring for support
- Use in dishes with chicken, omelets, sauces, vinegars (cider, wine, white), and in butters

### **Thyme** *Thymus vulgaris*

- one seed catalog lists 27 different thymes
- pungent and aromatic, *T vulgaris*, is the only one with any value in cooking (others are ornamental)
- is a bit taller (3 to 5 inches) than the other types is easy to start from seed
- doesn't like the soggy wet ground being from the Mediterranean, sometimes it lasts only a season or 2 in our gardens
- doesn't like to be crowded
- universal herb good with soups, meat, poultry, vegetables, stuffing, eggs, chowders, bouquet garn
- when dried it is more potent as the oils concentrate so be careful

### **Chervil** *Anthriscus cerefolium*

- a summer herb in the northern climate related to parsley but more delicate in its mild anise flavor as well as its appearance
- you can substitute parsley for chervil
- it has a faint aniseed flavour and is one of the herbs used to make up the French herb mixture fines herbs
- it is also reputed to aid digestion when turned into a tea
- loses its flavour easily, either by drying the herb or by exposing it to too much heat so it should be added at the end of cooking or sprinkled over food finely chopped and fresh

- Use in dishes with chicken, seafood and steamed baby vegetables

**Rosemary** *Rosmarinus officianalis*

- rosemary is known as the herb of remembrance
- in warm climate, rosemary is a vigorous hardy perennial shrub with a very strong growth habit. In cooler climates, it is grown as an annual or brought indoors in the winter
- if you have no success over wintering rosemary, try daily misting as this mimics the Mediterranean climate which receives most of its rain in the winter months
- I have also seen success when planted in a terra cotta pot & placed in a south window in a cool room & watering when dry
- fragrant evergreen herb native to the Mediterranean.
- it is used as a culinary condiment, to make bodily perfumes, and for its potential health benefits
- Use with beans, chicken, fish, game, grains, lamb, mushrooms, onions, oranges, peas and pork.

There are other culinary herbs but these are the basics ones. Get a good book and/or check the internet.

I encourage you to experiment with herbs, cut back on the salt & see if your food tastes better. Enjoy.