

# Growing & Using Culinary Herbs

Compiled by

Deborah Lee, PhD Holistic Health Practitioner  
[fourwinds@adams.net](mailto:fourwinds@adams.net) – [www.four-winds-farm.com](http://www.four-winds-farm.com)

## **BASIL** *Ocimum basilicum*

- 1. Botanical:** Mint family; basil leaves are opposite, oval, toothed and curled inward along a midrib. They are usually 2” to 3” long (varieties vary) with dark green or purple leaves. Plants grow 1-2’ tall and flower in the summer.
- 2. Growing:** Plant in rich, moist, warm, well-drained soil; full sun; soil pH 6.0. Start seeds indoors or purchase young starter plants. Young plants like hot weather, avoid early transplant. Many varieties can be successfully grown.
- 3. Culinary:** One of the most popular herbs; it has a rich, spicy and mildly peppery flavor, with a hint of mint and clove. Use leaves cooked or raw; fresh, frozen or dried. Basil is often associated with Italian cooking.
  - a. Basil goes well with:** tomatoes, cheese, white beans, pasta, rice, eggs, fish, poultry and most vegetables including: eggplant, zucchini and other summer squash, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower and spinach.
  - b. Add basil to:** soup, stews, sauces where vegetables are used.
  - c. Other uses:** *pesto*, garnish, basil vinegar and in salad dressing.
- 4. Harvest and Store:** Harvest young leaves all season, best before flowers form. Flowers can be eaten. Dry the leaves; or make them into pesto and freeze this mixture in small plastic containers or ice cube trays.

## **CILANTRO (CORIANDER)** *Coriandrum sativum*

- 1. Botanical:** The wispy plant grows to about 20”. Leaves are variable in shape: broadly lobed at the base of the plant, slender and feathery higher on the flowering stems. Flowers are small umbels, white or very pale pink and asymmetrical. Fruit is a globular and smaller than ¼” in diameter.
- 2. Growing:** Direct planting from seed works well. They prefer cool weather of late spring and mid-autumn. An annual; it will re-seed itself. Plant in a sunny area, loose soil.
- 3. Culinary:** All parts of the plant are edible, but the fresh leaves and the dried seeds are the parts most traditionally used in cooking in many cuisines including: Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Tex-Mex, Latin American, Portuguese, Chinese, African and Coastal Mexican. *Leaves have citrus overtones*. Some people sense an unpleasant soapy taste and avoid them. The leaves blend well with seafood; are often used in salsa or chutney. *Dry fruits are called coriander, a spice*.
- 4. Harvest and Store:** Once the plant starts to grow, harvest the leaves often; otherwise it will bolt to seed in a few weeks, as the spring weather warms. Use fresh.

### **DILL *Anethum graveolens***

1. **Botanical:** In the umbel family; feathery leaves and graceful yellow umbels. This annual likes cool weather.
2. **Growing:** Grows well from direct seeding. Successive seeding can be done April – July. Also, dill will self-sow for the next season. Let seeds on a plants dry and scatter these seeds were wanted. Cover lightly with soil.
3. **Culinary:** Both the feathery leaves and the seeds are used.
  - a. **Leaves:** Great with salmon and other fish. Chop and add to salads, cottage cheese or cream spreads. Also in potato salad, summer soups, chicken or tuna salad and sauces. Good with most vegetables.
  - b. **Seeds:** Use for pickles, breads, omelets, baked fish and egg salad.
4. **Harvest and Store:** Fresh young leaves can be harvested regularly. They dry quickly and store well. Collect ripe seed heads when they turn light brown.

### **FENNEL *Foeniculum vulgare***

1. **Botanical:** Semi-hardy perennial that is often harvested as an annual. Feathery leaves are alternately branched and grow on a plant that is 2'-4' tall. Stunning small, yellow, flat-topped flowers in a compound umbel appear July-October.
2. **Growing:** Plant seeds directly into humus-rich soil that drains well. Keep moist for several weeks, until the first leaves appear. Successive plantings can continue through mid-August. *Fennel is NOT a good companion plant. Keep it off to itself.*
3. **Culinary:** Fennel tastes like a softer and nuttier version of anise (licorice-like). Leaves, tender stems and seeds of sweet fennel are used. The stalks and bulbs of Florence fennel are used.
  - a. **Leaves:** Use fresh leaves in salads, with vegetables, in casseroles; also as garnish.
  - b. **Seeds:** (whole or ground) are used in pickles, breads, cakes, cookies, apple pie and beverages.
  - c. **Both leaves and seeds:** Use with fish, barley, rice, cabbage, sauerkraut, beets, potatoes, lentils, eggs and cheese; also duck, pork and sausage.
  - d. **Florence stalks and bulb:** Minced in salads, soups and casseroles
4. **Harvest and Store:** Fresh young leaves can be harvested regularly. They dry quickly and store well. Collect ripe seed heads when they turn light brown.

### **HORSERADISH *Armoracia rusticana***

1. **Botanical:** Herbaceous perennial of the mustard family. The long, white, tapering root produces a 2'-3' plant in the second year. Small white flowers. Leaves are abundant with the lower ones having long stalks. They are oblong, lobed or toothed; to 1' long.
2. **Growing:** Most often cultivated by root cuttings. Do so from straight, young roots, about 8-9" long and ½" wide. Each cutting needs a bud or growing point. Roots grow out and down. Plant 12-18" apart (in each direction) 12-15" deep; carefully remove the side roots first. Plant in rich soil; high in organic matter. *NOTE: Plants spread readily and can be a challenge to eradicate.*
3. **Culinary:** Root has a sharp, mustardy taste. Make a condiment by grating fresh root and adding vinegar (or sometimes mayo). Horseradish is good with smoked fish, beef, sausage, poached chicken, egg salad, potato salad, salmon salad (or patties) and beets.
4. **Harvest and Store:** Harvest annually for the best-quality root. These will stay fresh in the crisper drawer of the 'frig' for months. *Scrub well before storing.*

## LAVENDER *Lavandula angustifolia*

1. **Botanical:** There are several fine lavender varieties. English is the most aromatic. Lavender is a woody perennial that grows 1'-3' tall. Leaves are narrow, 2" long and a gray-green color. Flowers form mid-summer and are borne on long-stemmed slender spikes.
2. **Growing:** Transplant young starts outside after all danger of frost is past. Avoid wet, poorly-drained soil to prevent disease. Plant in rich, moist, warm, well-drained soil; full sun.
3. **Culinary:** Use flowers to make lavender lemon-aide, flavored vinegars, jellies and lavender cheesecake! Mix with dried Italian herbs to make "herbs de Provence", where lavender adds flair to this dried blend. Use it for eggs and omelets; or with vegetables like asparagus, carrots and summer squash. Leaves are edible, but not as flavorful as the flowers.
4. **Harvest and Store:** Cut the flower spike just before the florets are fully open; when the color and fragrance are at their best. Dry these rapidly.

## MINT *Mentha spp.*

1. **Botanical:** Mints represent a huge number of plants. They are aromatic and mostly perennial. Mints have wide-spreading underground, and over-ground stolons. Stems are erect and square. Leaves are in opposite pairs, oblong to lanceolate, often downy and having a serrated margin. Flowers are white to purple.
2. **Growing:** Mint loves to spread. It thrives in warm weather and sun; though most mints prefer partial shade. Mints starts easily as a transplant. Beware: it will spread in all directions. As a companion plant, it aids other plants in the garden; *but can be quite invasive.*
3. **Culinary:** Use the leaves, fresh or dried. Fresh is usually preferred. Leaves have a warm, fresh, aromatic, sweet flavor with a cool aftertaste. They are used in teas, beverages, jellies, syrups, candies, ice creams and for garnish. In Middle Eastern cuisine, mint is used on lamb dishes and in tabouli. NOTE: went making mint tea always use a non-metal pan to keep the robust flavor.
4. **Harvest and Store:** Harvest leaf sprigs preferably before they flower. The sprigs can be stored in a refrigerator fresh for several weeks, using a bag or container. Also, fresh sprigs dry quickly in a de-hydrator. Store in whole leaf form, within a glass jar.

## NASTURTIUM *Tropaeolum majus*

1. **Botanical:** Tender annual with round, light green (or variegated) leaves and showy yellow, orange or red flowers. Stems are elongated, giving the plant a spreading habit. Blooms until frost.
2. **Growing:** Plant seeds in a sunny spot when the soil is warm and all danger of frost is past. Soak seeds over night in water to promote germination. NOTE: *Nasturtium flowers best in an unfertile location. In rich well-drained soil there are may be mostly leaves...no flowers.*
3. **Culinary:** Flowers and leaves have a spicy, peppery flavor. Garnish is the main use for the flowers; they make a lovely addition to salads and other dishes. Stuffed flowers with a cream cheese spread. Add leaves to salads.
4. **Harvest:** Harvest flowers and leaves all summer when the plant is blooming.

### **OREGANO, GREEK *Origanum hirtum***

1. **Botanical:** Greek is the best oregano for culinary uses. It is a low, spreading perennial with fuzzy, pale green, round, ½ to 1” leaves and erect reddish stems. Roots form a dense clump and can spread rampantly. Flowers are rose-purple with terminal spikes; and edible. Bees love the flowers.
2. **Growing:** Oregano does not grow true to taste when grown from seed. Start as a young plant or from rooted cuttings to insure aroma. Oregano can be confined in a raised bed. Grow in full sun and good soil.
3. **Culinary:** Hot, peppery flavor. Best known for use in tomato sauces; a regular ingredient in Italian and Mexican main dishes. Good in cheese and egg recipes; also in sauces, with black beans, marinated with vegetables (including eggplant, peppers, mushrooms and summer squash). Enhances shellfish, pork, stewed beef and potatoes. The flowers make an attractive garnish for foods.
4. **Harvest:** Harvest the leaves after the plant is 2” tall – early spring to frost. Flowers bloom the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. They can be harvested and dried for ornamental uses. If needed, flowers and leaves can be cut back mid season for a second growth of young leaves.

### **PARSLEY *Petroselinum crispum***

1. **Botanical:** A familiar biennial plant, often grown as an annual. Parsley produces a rosette of leaves the first year and a flower stalk mid-summer the second year. There are 2 types of parsley: Curled and Italian. Curled has a stronger flavor. Italian (P.c. ‘Neopolitanum’) has broad, flat leaves.
2. **Growing:** Full or part shade. Plant seeds into medium-rich soil outdoors in *early* spring. Water regularly to keep the soil moist until the first leaves appear. It’s wise to re-plant each year (even though it is biennial). Doing so offers a full summer of picking. Roots can be eaten as like parsnip.
3. **Culinary:** More than garnish, parsley leaf is extremely rich in minerals; boasting more calcium than milk (and more easily absorbed). In Middle Eastern countries parsley is used frequently and respected as a vegetable.
  - a. **Use fresh or dried in:** soups, stews, herb butter and spread, salads (such as tabouli); with meat, poultry and vegetables.
  - b. **Flavor:** Curly leaf parsley has a stronger flavor than the flat leaf.
4. **Harvest and Store:** Leaves can be picked late spring thru fall. Parsley is easily dried and has a long shelf life.

### **ROSEMARY *Rosmarinus officinalis***

1. **Botanical:** A half-hardy perennial evergreen shrub, reaching a height of 2’-4’. Leaves are needle-like, leathery and dark green with a gray undersurface. Spring flowers are pale lavender-blue. The entire plant is fragrant with a balsamic aroma.
2. **Growing:** Purchase starter plants and plant them in a sunny spot with well-drained soil. Keep soil moist all season and fertilize lightly. In the fall young plants can be moved to a sunny spot indoors.
3. **Culinary:** Flavor is strong, yet subtle. It is pungent, a bit piney and mint-like, with a ginger finale. The flavor harmonizes really well with potatoes and pasta dishes. Rosemary blends with poultry, fish, lamb, beef, pork and game; especially when these are roasted. It enhances tomatoes/sauce, cheese, eggs and many vegetables. Use the sprigs for garnish.
4. **Harvest and Store:** Collect sprigs summer through fall. These dry easily on a counter top or hanging upside down. Store in an airtight container.

### **SAGE *Salvia officinalis***

1. **Botanical:** A shrubby perennial with gray foliage, lilac-blue flowers and a pungent scent. Plants grow to a height of 2' and tend to sprawl, unless they are trimmed 1 or 2 times a year.
2. **Growing:** Easiest way to establish sage is from young plants. Space at least 3' apart.
3. **Culinary:** Sage has a lemony, camphor-like, pleasantly bitter taste. It is a perfect partner to poultry. Sage goes well with sausage, meat pies, duck and lamb. It is pleasant in small amounts with yeasted breads and rolls, tomatoes, corn, eggplant, leeks, onions cabbage, lentils and cheese.
4. **Harvest and Store:** Harvest leaves before the plant blooms, or cut sprigs to 6"-8" and dry them. Do not boldly trim sage back after mid August; this could cause it to die over the winter. Sage dries quickly. Store in an air tight container and leave the leaves whole.

### **STEVIA *Stevia rebaudiana***

1. **Botanical:** Stevia is in the Aster/Composite family and native to Paraguay in subtropical South America. It is a tender-perennial, though considered an annual in the mid-west. Flowers are tiny and white. Ovate leaves are usually 1"-4" long; they shape varies according to genotype. Stems are stiff, brittle and non-woody.
2. **Growing:** Plant in moist, well-drained soil that is high in organic matter. It will re-seed, but new plants will not be true to taste. Propagate stem cuttings or buy starter plants from a nursery.
3. **Culinary:** Leaves have a notable sweetness that is shown to be 15 times sweeter than sugar; with a slight after taste. Dried leaves can be ground in a food processor and used as a sugar substitute. A little goes a long way. The flavor is very pleasant and there are no calories! Also, whole leaves (dried or fresh) can be infused into a pot of hot water along with other herbs to make tea, to sweeten lemon-aid or other to sweeten other beverages. Also use it for baking.
4. **Harvest and Store:** Harvest leaves or branches, summer through fall. These dry easily. As frost nears, the entire plant can be pulled up and hung upside down to dry. Store leaves whole in an air-tight container.

### **TARRAGON: *Artemisia dracunculus***

1. **Botanical:** *Artemisia dracunculus var. sativa*, is cultivated for its leaves as an aromatic culinary herb. French tarragon is the most flavorful, while both Russian and wild tarragon are less so. Plants grows to 2-3' tall, with slender branched stems. Leaves are lanceolate and glossy green, with an entire margin.
2. **Growing:** Purchase a starter plant. French tarragon may not produce flowers or seeds. If it does, the seeds are generally sterile. Tarragon has rhizomatous roots and reproduces by spreading. It likes full sun and can thrive in low water conditions.
3. **Culinary:** French tarragon is one of the four *finest herbes* of French cooking and is the main flavoring component in Béarnaise sauce. The leaves are particularly suitable for chicken, fish and egg dishes. Fresh, lightly bruised sprigs of tarragon are steeped in vinegar to produce tarragon vinegar.
4. **Harvesting:** Harvest the stems often. If it gets tall and lanky in summer, cut it back for a second flush of young, flavorful leaves.

**THYME** *Thymus vulgaris and sp.*

1. **Botanical:** Thyme is a low-growing, many branched perennial that can grow 4"-8" tall. It boasts lovely small flowers. These are white to pink to purple and grow in clusters. These are highly aromatic and bees love them.
2. **Growing:** Often an edging plant around the garden or walk-ways, the low-sprawling stems can get tough and wiry after several years. For this reason it is wise to set out new young plants every 2-3 years. Grows best in a sunny spot with well-drained soil. Transplants easily.
3. **Culinary:** Thyme has a warm flavor with a clove-like after taste. Use the tiny leaves. It goes with almost any meat, fish or poultry; also beans, cheese or vegetables. Sprigs make an attractive garnish.
4. **Harvest and Store:** Harvest the small sprigs. These dry easily, making it easier to remove the leaves afterward. Store in an air-tight container.

Compiled by: Deborah Lee PhD, Holistic Health Practitioner and Educator

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