



How to Grow Great Herbs

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Herbs are some of the most useful plants around. If you're cooking, nothing beats fresh herbs. Herbs can be part of great home cures and remedies for coughs, sore throats, headaches, and more. And herbs can make any home or garden smell fabulous. Even better, they're easy to grow and flourish the more you use them. With a little knowledge and preparation, anyone can grow great herbs at home.

Method
1

Starting Seeds

- 1 Read about the kinds of herbs you plan to grow.** Some herbs do better if you transplant them, rather than starting them from seeds.^[1] Reading up on the kinds of herbs you want to plant will also help you to figure out how much sun, space and water your plants will need, as well as when the best time to plant them is. It's also a good idea to find out the best type of dirt to start your seeds in. Growing great herbs starts with knowing your stuff!
- 2 Find a container with good drainage.** Clay pots work really well, of course, but there's no need to go out and buy them. Plastic containers like old yogurt, sour cream, or lunch meat containers with a few holes punched in the bottom also work really well. Egg containers are great too—just punch a single hole in the bottom of each compartment.^[2]
 - Wash your container before you use it. Water with 10% chlorine bleach (but no more!) works, as does a small amount of dish soap. Rinse well and allow containers to dry.^[3]
- 3 Fill your container with soil-less medium.** Do not use potting soil to start seeds. Find out what kind of dirt or soil-less medium works best for each kind of herb. Often, a fine-mix compost works best for herb seeds.^[4] You should use only about two to three inches of soil in each container.^[5]
- 4 Moisten the soil.** It should be wet throughout. Let the soil sit for 20 to 30 minutes before planting your seeds.^[6]
- 5 Plant your seeds.** It's very important that you plant your seeds at the correct depth. To find out how deeply to plant your seeds, you can check the seed packet they came in or look it up on the internet or in a good gardening book. Make sure that you follow seed-depth instructions! You'll also want to check how much sun your seeds will need in order to germinate.^[7]
- 6 Keep your newly planted seeds moist.** Make sure that the soil doesn't get too dried out—this will kill your seeds. But it's also important not to overwater. If your soil is muddy, you've watered too much and your seeds could drown.
 - Try bottom watering for great seedlings. Fill a baking tray with water and place your seed containers on top. When the soil at the top of the containers is moist, remove them from the tray. Repeat as necessary. Bottom watering helps to prevent overwatering, and also encourages your seedlings to grow deeper roots.^[8]
- 7 Cover the containers with plastic wrap.** This will help to keep your soil moist and the air inside the container humid. Uncover the containers every other day to ensure that they don't grow mildew. Once your seedlings show a few leaves, stop covering them.^[9]
- 8 Make sure your seeds get enough sun.** Even though your seeds are underground, they still need plenty of light in order to grow into great herbs—up to 16 hours a day! You may need to light them artificially if you don't get enough sun from your windows.^[10]

9 Transplant your seedlings. They are ready to be transplanted when they have several sets of leaves and are two to three inches tall.^[11] This will probably take about five to ten weeks.^[12] You'll have to take care in order to transplant successfully:

- If you're planting outside, wait until all danger of frost outside has passed. Frost will kill your seedlings.
- Try "hardening" your plants before planting them outside by leaving them outdoors in the shade for a little bit longer each day. In the beginning, only leave them in the shade for two hours or so and work them up to twenty-four hours. Hardening will help your plants to survive better if there's a long stretch of time with little to no sun.^[13]
- Take the lower leaves very gently off of your seedlings before transplanting. You will need to plant your seedlings just deeper than where its bottom leaves were.^[14]
- The best way to transplant your seedlings will depend on whether you want to plant them indoors or outdoors.

**Method
2****Planting an Indoor Herb Garden**

1 Choose a sunny spot for your herbs. Most herbs can grow just fine indoors, but it's important to make sure that they get enough sun. If you want to use natural light, you need at least one large, south-facing window that lets in at least four to six hours of unobstructed light every day. For the best herbs, you'll need to make sure that you rotate your indoor plants daily to ensure that one side doesn't get all the sun while the other side withers.^{[15][16]}

2 Set up artificial lighting if you don't have a naturally sunny spot in your home. Great herbs require plenty of light, and modern technology allows for indoor plants to get plenty of sun-like light indoors. You'll most likely want to use fluorescent light or LED light, but there are lots of options.

- Standard fluorescent tubes (T12 or T8) are cheap and easy to find. They don't emit heat, so you can place them close to your herbs (no closer than 12 inches). However, they tend to be dimmer at the ends, so the best indoor herbs are lit with multiple tubes. For the best herbs, purchase tubes that are color formatted especially for indoor gardens.
- The high-efficiency T5 fluorescent tube is better for great herbs. They spread more light over a wider area than standard tubes. You can even buy fixtures with adjustable stands, which will allow you to move your light up as your herbs grow taller.
- Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs) are another option, though they do not spread light as far or as efficiently as standard and T5 fluorescents do.
- LED (Light Emitting Diodes) are a rapidly changing new technology, and can be excellent for growing great herbs. "White" or "natural" LEDs are better for plant growth than red or blue LEDs. The downside of LEDs is that they are relatively expensive.
- If you're growing your herbs on a large scale, High-Intensity Discharge (HID) grow lights are best.^[17]

3 Gather your supplies. You'll need large clay or plastic pots (at least eight inches in diameter in order each plant to get as big as it can).^[18] You'll also need a good growing medium; for the best herbs, don't use potting soil.

- Great herbs don't need fertilizer. Fertilizer makes plants put all of their energy into growing faster and they lose much of their flavor—much like steroids do to humans.^[19]

4 Prepare your container. Fill it with soil or growing medium. Mix water into the soil with your hands until it feels moist throughout. It's a good idea to place a plate or tray under your pots, in case of leakage. If you don't want to use your own, you can find plates of this kind in the potting aisle of any gardening store.^[20]

5 Dig holes in the soil big enough to put your plants in. You'll need to dig the hole deep enough that you can place the plant and all of its soil and roots into the hole without any roots being exposed to the air.^[21]

6 Transplant your plant. Get the plant out of its container by turning the container over very carefully and tapping on the bottom. Pull very gently on the base of the plant's stem until it comes out of the container. Place the plant in the hole you dug and brush dirt into any spaces left in the hole; you can add more dirt to the container if you need to. Immediately after transplanting, water your plant.^[22]

- Watering your plant a couple of hours before transplanting it will make your plant happy, and it will also make

the soil easier to move into the new container.^[23]

- Never pull a plant out of its container by the stem. This stresses the plant out and also kills its root system.

7 Water your plants only enough to keep the soil moist. Your soil should never get dry all the way through, but it shouldn't be constantly waterlogged, either. Mud in a pot is a bad sign.^[24]

8 Keep the climate comfortable for the best herbs. You can do this by keeping an oscillating fan in the room with your plants and turning it on, on low, for a few hours every day. Misting your plants regularly with a spray bottle will also help maintain a plant-friendly level of humidity in the air around your garden.^[25]

Method
3

Planting an Outdoor Herb Garden

1 Find the perfect spot for your herbs. Herbs are always happier in the ground than in pots—as long as they get enough sunshine and have enough space to grow. So you'll need to find a spot that is sunny and roomy.

- Most herbs are happiest with full, day-long sunlight. But if you live in a place where the summer heat is regularly above 90 degrees, you might be better to find a spot that's sunny for at least four hours in the morning or evening and shady when the day is at its hottest. ^[26] Make sure you check how much sun each type of herb you plant needs in order to be happy. Different types of herbs need different amounts of sun.^[27]
- Make sure that you know how big your plants will get and how much space they need to reach their full potential. You can usually find this information on your seed packets or on the tags that came in your potted herbs. Count how many plants you have and multiply it by the amount of space each one needs in order to figure out how big your garden needs to be.^[28]

2 Prepare the soil. Dig 10 to 12 inches into the dirt you've plotted out for your garden, then use a gardening fork to turn over the dirt. This step is very important, because the dirt in your yard is hard and doesn't allow water to drain or plants to stretch out their roots. When you're done, mix a layer of compost into your soil. Then, level off the ground in your garden plot with a rake.^{[29][30]}

- The best herbs grow in a neutral to slightly acidic soil. If you're not sure that your soil is good for an herb garden, you can use a soil test kit to test it. If it turns out that your soil is bad for an herb garden, don't fret! You can always set up raised beds and fill them with better soil.^[31]

3 Prepare your beds for transplanting. Dig holes that are deep enough for your plant's entire root system to be completely underground. Make sure that you leave plenty of space in between holes for your plants to grow. Great herbs never have to fight each other for resources.^[32]

4 Transplant your plants. Remove a plant from its container by turning the container over carefully and tapping on the bottom. Then you can pull the plant out gently by the base of the stem. Gently place your plant into its hole so that the base of the plant is even with the ground. Then fill in the rest of the hole with dirt and press down the top layer of soil.

- Water your plants a couple of hours before you transplant them to reduce shock and make the soil in the container more manageable.
- For the best herbs, transplant when the day is overcast or in the evening. This reduces shock for your plants.^[33]
- Never yank a plant out of its container by the stem. This can kill its root system and damage the plant.

5 Water your garden after transplanting. This will help mix the soil from your container with the soil from your garden to prevent transplant shock. It will also lessen the stress of the move for the plant—just like a cold drink at the end of a hard day does for humans.

- To grow the best herbs, only water your garden when the top layer of soil loses moistness. Don't wait until your herbs begin to wilt to water them. Keep track of the weather forecast—don't water your plants right before it rains!^[34]

Method
4**Maintaining Your Herb Garden**

- 1 Fertilize your herbs rarely, if ever.** Great herbs don't need fertilizer. Fertilizing your herbs makes them grow faster, but all that growing takes away from the plant's flavor and can even turn them bitter. If your plants need a little bit of help, try fish emulsion or bone matter—and only rarely.^[35]
 - If you do use a fertilizer (rather than fish emulsion or bone matter), avoid eating the plant for at least 6 weeks.

- 2 Water your herbs only when they become dry.** Too much water will kill an herb faster than too little water. Once established, most herbs prefer to be a bit on the dry side which makes them great for a beginner gardener. Only water when the soil on top is dry to the touch. Check the soil regularly to see if it needs water.^[36]

- 3 Harvest your herbs often.** For the best herbs, start trimming your herbs as soon as they are mature so that the trimming will not kill them. The more you use them the bushier they become and the more useful they are. To harvest, cut close to a leaf intersection—the spot where the branch splits off to form leaves. This signals to the plant that it needs to grow more leaves.^[37]
 - Harvest the leaves of your herb before the plant flowers. If your herbs are outdoors, harvest them in the morning, after the dew has dried off and before the day gets too hot.
 - Avoid washing herb leaves, as this strips away some of their flavor. A light rinsing to remove any dirt is enough, as long as you're not using pesticides.
 - Harvest herb flowers before they are fully open.
 - Harvest herb seeds when the seed pods change color.
 - Dig up herb roots in late summer or the beginning of autumn.^[38]

- 4 Use your herbs right after you harvest them.** Great herbs are at their best immediately after you pick them because they are still alive. The longer you wait to eat them, the less flavorful they will be.

- 5 Remember that most herbs are annual plants.** Annual plants are plants that only live for one season—they need to be re-planted annually. This means that much your herb garden is not likely to live through the winter. When your herbs start to die in the fall, this is nature—not a failure on your part!^[39]

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