

# HERBS- CHOICES FOR YOUR SPRING GARDEN

## HERBS IN THE KITCHEN

Remember that herbs should enhance rather than overpower: add in small amounts, tasting as you go. It's best to add the more delicate herbs in the last 5-10 minutes of cooking, so you don't cook away their volatile oils and flavors. Dried herbs are generally about twice as strong as fresh ones, so measure accordingly in converting from one form to another. Try an unfamiliar herb on your taste buds by snipping a small amount into a bit of butter or cottage cheese. Let the mixture sit for about an hour to blend, then try it on a plain cracker.

### SOME ESSENTIAL CULINARY HERBS - PARSLEY, SAGE, ROSEMARY AND THYME...

#### **PARSLEY (*PETROSELINUM*)**

**Growing tip:** Start new plants each year. Plant in early spring (provide partial shade in hot climates)

**Harvest tip:** Pick outside leaves so the center of the plant continues to develop new ones.

**Uses:** Bouquets, garnish, cheese sauces, pestos, soups, stews, stuffings, vegetables, and as a garnish. I love Italian Parsley too!!!

#### **SAGE (*SALVIA OFFICINALIS*)**

**Growing tip:** Keep plant on the dry side once established. Avoid planting near a lawn where the soil stays wet. Give afternoon shade in hot climates

**Harvest tip:** Cut just above where new growth emerges; don't cut into old, woody growth.

**Uses:** Beans, breads, butters, cheeses, gravies, lamb, marinades, soups, stews, and tomatoes.

#### **ROSEMARY (*ROSMARINUS*)**

**Growing tip:** These are tough plants that take wind and salt spray, or inland heat if given moderate water. Too much fertilizer and water produce rank growth and woodiness.

**Harvest tip:** Prune regularly to encourage new growth.

**Uses:** Breads, cheeses, dressings, eggs, legumes, marinades, oils, potatoes, poultry soups, stews, stuffing, and vegetables.

#### **THYME (*THYMUS*)**

**Growing tip:** Use as a low edging for vegetable or herb gardens.

**Harvest tip:** For best flavor, cut back before flowers appear. Hold foliage like a ponytail and shear it to about 6 inches tall.

**Uses:** Bouquets garnishes, breads, casseroles, cheeses, eggs, fish, grains, marinades, meats, mushrooms, poultry, soups, stews, tomato-based sauces, and vegetables.



## OTHER KITCHEN HERBS FOR YOUR GARDEN

#### **BASIL (*OCIMUM BASILICUM*)**

**Growing tip:** Basil thrives when the soil is warm and nighttime temperatures are above 60°, so don't rush springtime planting. To encourage branching, cut back stems to just above the first set of leaves when plants have developed three pairs of leaves

**Harvest tip:** Prune often to avoid flower formation. When a stem has developed four pairs of leaves, cut each stem down to just above the first set. Continue cutting plants back throughout the summer, or set out new seedlings in succession a month or so apart and harvest the entire plant for pesto.

**Uses:** Eggs, marinades, meats, pastas, pestos, salads, soups, stews, and tomatoes.

#### **CHIVES (*ALLIUM*)**

**Growing tip:** Increase the number of plants by dividing in winter every two years or so.

**Harvest tip:** Gather chives by snipping the spears to the ground (otherwise you'll have unsightly brown foliage mixed in with the green).

**Uses:** Butters, cheeses, eggs, cream cheese, potatoes, rice, salads, sauces, soups, sour cream, stews, and vegetables.

#### **CILANTRO (*CORIANDRUM SATIVUM*)**

**Growing tip:** Cilantro grows best in cool weather. Plant in early spring after last frost (autumn in the low desert). If practical, start from seed; cilantro has a taproot and transplants poorly. Plant in succession every few weeks through summer. Once it goes to seed, the flavor changes.

**Harvest tip:** Cut off leaves as needed. Harvest the entire plant before it starts to flower.

**Uses:** Beans, curries, fish, lamb, Mexican dishes, pork, poultry, salads, salsas, sauces stir-fries.

#### **OREGANO (*ORIGANUM*)**

**Growing tip:** Needs especially good drainage. Plants thrive on little to moderate water.

**Harvest tip:** Oil is strongest when the plant is in bud but before flowers open. Cut back to 4 inches tall in late spring, summer, and fall.

**Uses:** Beans, cheeses, eggs, meats, pastas, salsas, sauces, soups, stews, and vegetables.

#### **SWEET MARJORAM (*ORIGANUM MAJORANA*)**

**Growing tip:** Needs especially good drainage. Plants thrive on little to moderate water.

**Harvest tip:** Oil is strongest when the plant is in bud but before flowers open. Cut back to 4 inches tall in late spring, summer, and fall.

**Uses:** Cheeses, eggs, fish, gravies, meats, pastas, poultry, rice, sauces, soups, stews, and vegetables.

## RECIPES

### ITALIAN HERB BLEND RECIPE

An excellent Italian herb blend. Can mix it with olive oil, add it to any tomato based dishes, your favorite soups and all recipes calling for Italian seasonings!

#### Ingredients:

1/4 cup dried marjoram, crumbled  
1/4 cup dried oregano, crushed  
1/4 cup dried rosemary leaves, crushed  
1/4 cup dried thyme leaves, crushed

#### Preparation:

Combine all ingredients in a medium bowl and mix well. Transfer to an airtight container and store in a cool, dry place.



### BASIL PESTO RECIPE

What to do with all that basil in your gardens?....Basil Pesto for sure!!!

#### Ingredients

2 cups fresh basil leaves, packed  
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan  
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil  
1/3 cup pine nuts or walnuts  
2 medium sized garlic cloves, minced  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
*Special equipment needed:* A food processor or chopper

#### Preparation:

Combine the basil in with the pine nuts, pulse a few times in a food processor. (If you are using walnuts instead of pine nuts and they are not already chopped, pulse them a few times first, before adding the basil.) Add the garlic, pulse a few times more.

Slowly add the olive oil in a constant stream while the food processor is on. Stop to scrape down the sides of the food processor with a rubber spatula. Add the grated cheese and pulse again until blended. Add a pinch of salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

Serve with pasta, or over baked potatoes, or spread over toasted baguette slices.



## HERBS: EDIBLE HERB FLOWERS

Why not be one of those innovative home cooks to revive the lost art of using flower blossoms to add elegance to your cooking! The flavors of flowers range from spicy to sweet to herbal: most, you'll find, are simply a milder form of their fragrances.

### HERB FLOWERS (FROM YOUR HERB GARDEN)

**BASIL**

**CHIVES**

**OREGANO**

**ROSEMARY**

**SAGE**



Flavor/texture: They taste like the herb's leaves, but often with a touch of sweetness. They can be tiny and delicate, so pick right before using, or snip the entire blossom stem and put it in water until ready to use.

Growing tips: Most of the common perennial culinary herbs are Mediterranean in origin- full sun, good drainage, and light to moderate irrigation. Annual culinary herbs generally need more water and perform better in enriched soil, especially herbs of tropical origin, such as basil. Although a perennial, garlic chives also need regular water.



### MORE EDIBLE FLOWERS

- **AUSTRALIAN VIOLETS**- dress up salads desserts and fresh cut fruit.
- **CHIVE BLOSSOMS**- These lovely lavender-pink blossoms are great eye catchers and delicious additions or garnishes for salads, eggs, potatoes, cream cheese and any dish where a mild, subtle onion flavor spurs the appetite.
- **NASTURTIUMS** - Cool Season Flowers The leaves and flowers are edible, with a peppery taste and they look beautiful as well as garnish for cheese platters and more. Fun to add to spring salads!

### RECIPE

#### CANDIED VIOLETS RECIPE

Nick likes to use Australian Violets in his gardens the flowers are edible (as long as your not using pest sprays)

#### Ingredients

40 Violets

1 egg white, beaten frothy

1/2 cup confectioners sugar

2 drops almond extract

1 tablespoon water



#### Preparation:

Wash violets and drain. Do not attempt to remove the green calyx (the two green parts of the flower that enclose the flower while in the bud stage). Add extract to water and softly beaten egg white. Brush on violets, covering each flower well and lay on wax paper. Sprinkle with confectioners sugar, completely covering both sides. They can be dried in a sunny window in 2 or 3 days or in the oven at 200° for 20-30 minutes.

Store in glass jars. Garnish desserts with the violets.

## HERBS: TEA

For pure fresh ingredients, nothing beats growing herbal tea plants right in your own garden. Their naturally sweet, caffeine-free, and aromatic flavors are both inviting and restorative. Use their leaves and flowers to steep by themselves and serve with honey and lemon. You can even blend with regular tea for interesting, new flavors. Whether you serve it hot in steaming mugs to comfort and soothe, or iced in tall glasses to refresh and cool on a hot day, herbal teas are a welcome pleasure for all ages.

**LEMON BALM**- Sweetly cordial lemon flavor and citrus aroma

**CHAMOMILE**-restorative tea with an apple/pineapple scent.

**ANISE HYSSOP**- lavender flowers and green leaves make this a naturally sweet anise-scented tea.

**MINTS**- best grown in large pots to keep them from growing wild.

There are many varieties beyond the old **PEPPERMINT/SPEARMINT** plants (though they remain some of our favorites)

Some new varieties on the market worth a try in iced teas, punches and garnish.

**APPLE MINT**- Sunny, sweet scent, warmly flavored of minted apples.

**ORANGE BERGAMONT**- Scented like minty Earl Grey tea.

**GRAPEFRUIT MINT**- herbal citrus/mint scent.

**LAVENDER MINT**- Woodsy, floral lavender scent combined with mint.

**PINEAPPLE MINT**- Fruity/mint scent.



### RECIPE

#### HERBAL TEA RECIPE

[Herb tea](#) is a delicious alternative to sugary, caffeinated drinks. No matter if you buy it already in the bag, or mix up your own recipe, you can follow these simple directions and end up with the perfect cup of herb tea.



#### Ingredients

Glass or china cup and saucer

1 Cup of boiled water

Your choice: 1 teaspoon dried herb, or 3 teaspoons fresh herb (or 1 tea bag)

(A favorite of ours is from the Mint family and Chamomile Blend--ummmm ummmm good!)

Honey and or Lemon if desired

#### Preparation:

Heat water to just boiling.

Add measured amount of [herbs](#) to cup (or teabag )

Pour boiled water over herbs.

Cover with saucer to keep the oils from escaping with the steam.

Steep 3 to 5 minutes Strain out herbs

Add honey and lemon to taste if desired.

#### Tips:

With either fresh or dried herbs, crush with the back of a spoon before adding water. This releases the oils in the herb. These oils are what impart the flavor to the water.

Remember, cover your cup of tea immediately after adding water. You will enjoy the taste of the tea much more.

## HERBS : MEDICINAL

- **ALOE VERA** is a plant that grows commonly in the southwestern United States. The leaves produce a mucous-like substance that possesses cooling and healing properties. It can be used against sunburn, kitchen burns, and other skin irritations. In a juice form, aloe vera is used against ulcerative colitis, constipation, and other digestive diseases.
- **SAGE** is a cooking herb as well as a medicinal plant. It was often used to help indigestion, flatulence, depression, and menopausal symptoms.
- **PEPPERMINT** Besides its delicious smell, peppermint has been in use since ancient times for its medicinal properties. It is used to help upset stomach, spastic colon, and irritable bowel syndrome, as well as to reduce fevers.
- **CALENDULA** is an important addition to a healer's garden. Its striking orange flowers are used as a soothing skin wash, tea and salve. They are edible for a cheerful addition to a salad as well. Because it is so gentle, calendula is often an ingredient in diaper salves and other baby related skincare items. Calendula offers a beautiful spot of color in any landscape. The flowers will readily reseed themselves, so consider this when planting. Look for plants that are sticky with resin, for this is the medicinal quality that you need. There are many cultivated varieties that may or may not work in the medicinal sense. Look for *Calendula Officinalis*, to be certain it is the right variety
- **CHAMOMILE** Besides being known as a soothing tea, chamomile can be used for a number of ailments, including a cold, diarrhea, earache, toothache, digestive disorders, eczema, and common wounds. Chamomile is a sweetly scented, light tasting herb. Its many uses have been known for many years. Chamomile is a gentle soother for teas and skin washes.
- **EVENING PRIMROSE** -The roots can be eaten and the shoots can be added into a salad. A tea is often made from the roots to treat obesity and bowel pain. Leaves and bark, which are made into evening primrose oil, treat rheumatoid arthritis, eczema, acne, and premenstrual disorders.
- **ECHINACEA** This lovely flowering plant is known as one of the most important medicinal herbs in any medicinal garden. It can be used to treat wounds, burns, insect bites, and even snakebites. It is also used to strengthen the immune system in fighting allergies.
- **FEVERFEW** is a very old medicinal plant that has been used for hundreds of years to treat colds, fevers, and arthritis, as well as for bruises, swollen feet, and to help with migraine headaches.
- **FENUGREEK** The seeds of fenugreek are nutritious and are taken to treat inflammation of the stomach and intestines. It can also be used for the treatment of late onset diabetes, to lower cholesterol levels, to prevent cancer of the liver, and for labor pains.

### Precautions When Using Medicinal Plants

Pregnant or nursing women should not use medicinal plants unless under the supervision of their doctors. Always let your physician know what medicinal plants you have been using. If there are any changes in heart rhythm, vision, mental processes, dizziness, itching, rashes, or abnormal bleeding, discontinue use of medicinal plants and consult with your physician.



## HERBS: SLEEP PILLOWS

Sleep pillows are an age old tradition. Aromatherapists explore the role of fragrance in bringing about significant physiological and emotional effects. Because olfactory neurons are connected directly to the brain, simply inhaling a scent can stimulate the release of hormones that generate a range of feelings and responses; they can calm fear or anger, relieve stress or pain, and yes, bring sleep. There is thus foundation for the belief that a pleasant fragrance in one's pillow can alleviate mental and emotional stress, a frequent cause of sleeplessness.

Sleep pillow sare made of bits of fabrics, and can be of any size, but are better small and relatively flat so that they will lie smoothly and unnoticed in a standard pillow case. Try some of the below...a favorite is Lavender, Rose Petals and Chamomile...Ahhhhhhhh!

- **LAVENDER-** Sedative effects. It has pleasant associations for many people and is said to be able to dispel headaches.
- **ROSE PETALS -** An afternoon in grandmas garden. Roses is said to sooth emotions, relieve headaches, and generally make you feel better.
- **CHAMOMILE-**Respond to discourage nightmares.
- **SWEET WOODRUFF & SWEET CLOVER-** Smell of grass on a summer day. Sweet woodruff combines the fragrances of vanilla and new-mown hay
- **EUCALYPTUS-** Great for anyone with a cold.

