



Garden Tips & Techniques: Perennial & Annual Herbs

Culinary herbs are an indispensable and beautiful addition to the home garden. They flower, drawing tiny parasitic wasps and pollinators. Some of them, like the odiferous lavender plant, repel pests. Homegrown herbs are a great money saver – you can grow in abundance the same little flavor-packed leaves that cost an arm & a leg in the grocery store. Most herbs are also very adaptable. They can handle small spaces, growing in containers, and drying out a bit. And some of them will return for years and years. Check out the notes below to learn which herbs will come back, and how to tend them!

FAVORITE PERENNIAL HERBS

The herbs on this list will come back from year to year in our locale. Herbaceous (do not have woody stems) and some small shrub-like perennial herbs like to be divided every few years, to help them continue growing vigorously. If the herb looks like it is growing in a tight clump, it's probably time to divide. In the spring or fall, when the weather is still cool, take a sharp trowel or shovel and slice through the clump. Remove about half – give to a friend or plant in another part of the garden. Cut the herb back to about half its height, so the plant can focus on growing new roots. Fertilize with compost or fish emulsion and seaweed, and water well. Herbs that benefit from division (D) are marked below.

- Chives (D) – onion flavor, beautiful edible pink blooms in spring
- Garlic Chives (D) – garlic/onion flavor, edible white blooms in spring/summer
- Lavender (English varieties) - strong floral flavor, leaves and flowers edible – good in pastries & desserts
- Lovage (D) – strong celery flavor, very tall plant with clusters of yellow flowers
- Marjoram (D) – short, shrubby plant, related to oregano but softer, sweeter flavor
- Mint (D) – many varieties available, from peppermints to spearmints...can become invasive!
- Oregano (D) – short shrub-like plant with strong flavor good in Italian foods
- Rosemary (sometimes annual, based on our winter weather) – piney, rich flavor good with meats & potatoes, heavy mulching increases chances of winter survival
- Sage – floral, rich flavor especially good in autumn dishes, purple edible flowers, benefits from yearly pruning
- Salad Burnet (D) – frilly soft leaves, light cucumber flavor, eaten raw
- French Tarragon (D) – propagated only from other plants (not seeds), anise flavor, used in crème brûlée
- Thyme (D) – short shrubby plant, usually very hardy, rich & versatile flavor – good on vegetables and meats

FAVORITE ANNUAL HERBS

These herbs will not survive the winter. If allowed to flower and go to seed, some of the dropped seeds may sprout in following years.

- Basil – many varieties available, most have a bright slightly anise flavor – great for pesto!
- Borage – cucumber flavor, leaves are hairy and unappealing to eat, blue flowers are beautiful, edible and attract pollinators and predatory wasps (may reseed)
- Cilantro – goes to flower and seed quickly in the summer heat – plant successions every few weeks to keep a steady supply (may reseed)
- Dill – useful for pickle-making, fronds and yellow flowers/seed heads are edible, seed a couple of successions for continuous supply (may reseed)
- Lemon Verbena – lemony flavor is great for tea, if possible bring plant inside for winter months

FAVORITE BIENNIAL HERBS

There's just one on this list. Parsley! This herbaceous plant dies back in the winter, and then comes back the following year. And then it goes to seed. For that reason, we suggest planting new parsley every year, even though it does come back. Newly planted parsley is a lot more palatable - less bitter - than the old stuff anyway, so unless you're planning to save seed, go ahead and treat it like an annual.

Did we miss any? If you've got a favorite culinary herb that we neglected to address, just let us know and we'll be happy to add it to its appropriate list!