



Get Up & Move!

Family Activity

Series 2: May



Herb Gardens

Many flowers and plants begin to grow during the month of May. This month is also a good time for you and your family to enjoy the benefits of flowers and plants by starting your own garden. You might want to try growing an herb garden. Starting an herb garden is not too difficult and does not require that many supplies. Herbs are also great to have in the kitchen because they add flavor to food without adding extra fat and calories.

You and your family can consider starting your herb garden in indoor containers or window boxes. The following are a list of material that you might want to have to start your herb garden.

- Gardening tools (forks, shovels, rakes)
- Herb seeds, plants, or plant parts
- Large containers with drainage holes
- Seed-starting containers, soilless planting mix, fluorescent lights

Creating an Herb Garden:

1. Plan the vision:

Wherever you're raising herbs – outdoors in the garden or in containers inside – you and your family should consider what role your herb garden will have. Do you want it to have a theme? Here are a few theme ideas:

- **Herbal vinegars (or salad dressing)** – good plants for these products include tarragon, chives, basil, dill, rosemary, thyme, and lemon balm.
- **Colonial herbs** – these gardens have herbs that were used in “olden” times. For example, rosemary was believed to calm naughty children and sage was used to color gray hair. Thyme, oregano, parsley, and savory might also be found in this type of garden.
- **Spaghetti herbs** – consider raising culinary herbs necessary for spaghetti: basil, oregano, parsley, garlic, and fennel.
- **Herbal teas** – you may want to dry, bag, and sell your own teas with the herbs from this type of garden. Chamomile, lemon balm, peppermint, and spearmint are good herbs to choose.
- **Fragrant herbs** – this type of garden should have particularly aromatic herbs: basil, rosemary, mints, lavender, thyme, lemon verbena, oregano, chamomile and savory.
- **Container herbs** – if you plan to raise herbs in containers, you might want to try these easy-to-grow plants: thyme, mint, parsley, basil, sage, marjoram and oregano.

2. Prepare the soil:

Most herb plants require similar growing conditions: a minimum of six hours of sunlight per day and moderately rich soil with good drainage. To improve the soil structure and drainage, you should use garden forks or shovels to loosen the soil to a depth of 8 to 12 inches before planting. If you are planting in an area with nutrient-poor, dry, heavy, or poorly-drained soil, add some

organic matter, such as compost, before planting. Rake the soil to form a fine, even bed, which is particularly important if you're growing herbs from seeds.

3. Plant seeds, plants, or parts

Herbs may be annuals, started from seeds each year, such as basil; biennials, requiring two seasons of growth, such as parsley; or perennials, which grow back year after year, like thyme. Generally, you should plant annual and biennial herbs from seeds directly in the garden or in containers indoors (to transplant), or by seedlings.

Starting from seeds– If you want to get a jump on the season, you can start herb seeds indoors under lights or on sunny windowsills and later transplant them to the garden. Use the same types of containers and soilless potting mix that you would use for other indoor seedlings. To encourage healthy seedlings, keep soil mix uniformly moist until seeds germinate, keep lights 3 to 6 inches above the plants, and water seedlings thoroughly when the mix is dry to the touch. Herb seeds tend to be small, so whether you're starting them indoors or in the garden, plant them fairly shallowly (see seed packet for planting depths.)

Before you move seedlings outdoors, “harden” them off to get them accustomed to harsher outdoors conditions. Do this by setting them outside for progressively longer periods each day, starting with a few hours and increasing to a full day over the course of a week or so.

Starting from plants or plant parts – You can purchase many herbs from nurseries as young plants, or dig up shoots or sections of mature perennial plants in the spring. Some herbs can also be started from stem cuttings. To do this, snip healthy stems 3 to 6 inches from the growing tip. Remove leaves from the lower half of the cutting, and plant the cutting in a soilless mix indoors or in moist sand in a shady outdoor area. Water it gently and cover the container with a plastic bag until new top growth appears. Keep cuttings out of direct sun so they don't overheat in their plastic-bag “greenhouse.”

How you lay out your planting will depend on the plants you choose and on your theme. Herbs, like most plants, stay healthier if there's good air circulation, so space them to allow for the mature size of each plant. (Catalogs, seed packets, and nursery containers give spacing requirements.)

4. Harvest!

You can harvest most herbs continually as soon as the plant has enough foliage to sustain growth. If you want to dry herbs to use as cooking ingredients, you should spread them in a single layer on trays or screens, or hang them in bundles using rubber bands to hold the stems together. Place the herbs in a dark, well-ventilated place until they are completely dry. Store them in the dark airtight containers.



Source: (www.kidsgardening.com)