

Culinary Herbs

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For everyone out there who likes to eat (and I'm assuming that is everyone) you may want to consider growing some culinary herbs in your garden or on your patio this summer. Many herbs are well adapted to container gardening because of their small size. The containers can be placed on patios, porches, or balconies. Herbs with a cascading habit do well in hanging baskets. Most herbs do best in full sun though some can handle partial shade. Herbs are easy to grow and fun to add to your food.

Below are some herbs that can be planted in full sun and enriched soil. If you haven't already added organic matter (such as compost or aged manure) to your sandy soil do so before planting these herbs.

Sweet basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is a popular annual that is the main ingredient in pesto. There are many types, from large to small leaved, with leaf colors ranging from green to purple to variegated. This plant can be started easily from seed and grown in full sun or partial shade. The tender green leaves may be used fresh or dried in soups, stews, sauces, meat, fish, eggs, salads or with vegetables.

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) is the plant whose young leaves and fully developed green fruits give dill pickles their name. This herb is an erect, strong-smelling annual which grows to 4 feet. Attractive yellow flowers are produced in large umbels. Dill grows easily from seed. The leaves can be used fresh or dried along with the dried seeds in soups, stews, sauces, fish, eggs, pickles, salads and vegetables. This plant is also a host plant for the Black Swallowtail butterfly so if you see caterpillars just buy more plants so you all have enough to eat!

Mints are some of the easiest-to-grow perennial herbs in Florida. Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) and peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) are two of the most popular mints. Mints are easiest to start from cuttings or buying a four and a half inch pot from a nursery. Mints prefer moist soil and can tolerate shade or full sun. The leaves and flowering tops are the useful parts that can be used either fresh or dried. Mints can also be grown in hanging baskets, containers, or in the landscape. If mints are planted in the ground they will try to take over! Withholding water will slow down their growth.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*) does well and the fresh leaves can be used in soups, stews, sauces, meat, fish, eggs salads, and vegetables. The fresh leaves can also be chewed to freshen the breath. When harvesting the parsley just remove the outer leaves and don't bother the central growth. Parsley looks attractive in hanging baskets, containers, or in the landscape. Parsley is another host plant for the Black Swallowtail butterfly so let those caterpillars live!

Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) are perennials and can be started from seed but will take a long time to produce plants large enough to use in your cooking. The hollow, tubular leaves of chives are used fresh in dressings, soups, omelets, etc. Chives can be grown in pots or used in the landscape as an edging plant, border, or in a

rock garden. It is a good practice to dig up the plants, pull them apart and replant them every 3 to 4 years. Chives don't dry well but they can be chopped up and frozen, either in an ice cube or in a freezer bag. For some herbs that can handle our sandy soil and full sun read on;

Rosemary (*Rosmarinum officinalis*) is a woody shrub that can grow up to four feet or more. It can be grown in full sun to partial shade but needs well-drained soils. The fresh leaves can be used with meat, fish, game, vegetables, cheese, eggs, soups, stews, sauces and salads. The dried stems that are stripped of their leaves can also be burned in the fireplace or barbeque for a wonderful aroma.

Oregano (*Origanum heracleoticum*) is a low growing, perennial, ground cover for well-draining soils. The fresh leaves can be used in stews, soups, cheese, eggs, bread, meat, shellfish, vegetables, pizza and nachos. The leaves have the best flavor when the flowers are beginning to bloom. Oreganos also make a great ground cover where there is a slope and possible erosion.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) is a shrubby perennial that comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Usually, it is a small growing plant less than 1 1/2 feet tall, with very tiny gray-green leaves. Purplish flowers are formed at the ends of the stems. To harvest, remove the top one-third portion of the plant when in full bloom and spread on newspaper in a well-ventilated room to dry. After they are dry, strip the leaves and flowering tops from the stem and store in tightly closed containers.

This is just a partial list of some of the culinary herbs that can be grown in your landscape, container garden, or vegetable garden. Whether you grow parsley in a hanging basket, chives in a clay pot on your balcony, or rosemary along your front walk, everyone can enjoy the flavor of home grown herbs.