

GROW HERBS FOR HEALTH

Herbs are among the easiest plants to grow—provided you have a sunny patch somewhere on your lawn—and can supply you with sweet or savory tastes in the kitchen and a homegrown source of natural medicines.

From the earliest human settlements onward, herbs have been a welcome part of the garden. Primitive cave paintings in France that feature herbs date back to 25,000 BC. During the Middle Ages, herbs appeared in every cottage plot; religious orders in particular grew swaths of sweet-scented or deeply pungent herbs—the former to



Various herbs growing in pots

nourish their cherished honeybees, the latter to make into rich, ritual incense. By the Victorian era, gardening had reached a zenith, both indoors and out, and wealthy estate owners boasted of conservatories where exotic orchids grew beside collections of rare herbs, while their harderier cousins adorned exterior knot gardens and parterres.



Label your plants with waterproof markers

STEP-BY-STEP

You shouldn't feel the need to create a landscaping masterpiece with your first herb garden, but it pays to follow a few ground rules.

1. Most herbs enjoy the sun, or at least semi-sun. Place your garden where the plants will receive a maximum amount of daylight. Make sure to keep tall varieties such as sage, rosemary, and marjoram at the back, and shorter plants such as parsley and cilantro at the front.
2. If your property is large, consider placing the garden near the house, perhaps as a "kitchen garden" just outside the back door.
3. Before planting, till the soil at least a foot down so that it drains well. Most herbs do not enjoy wet feet. You can improve clay or dense soil with the addition of peat moss, compost, or coarse sand.
4. Starting herbs from seeds can be difficult, so begin with potted plants from a nursery. Dig your holes to twice the width of the root ball.
5. Plant early or late in the day so that delicate baby herbs do not wilt in the hot sun.
6. Space your plants about 18 inches apart; herbs like room to spread out.
7. It's important to label your plants with waterproof markers. The flowers of many herbs look alike, so you won't have them to guide you once the plants enlarge.