

HOW TO GROW WITH

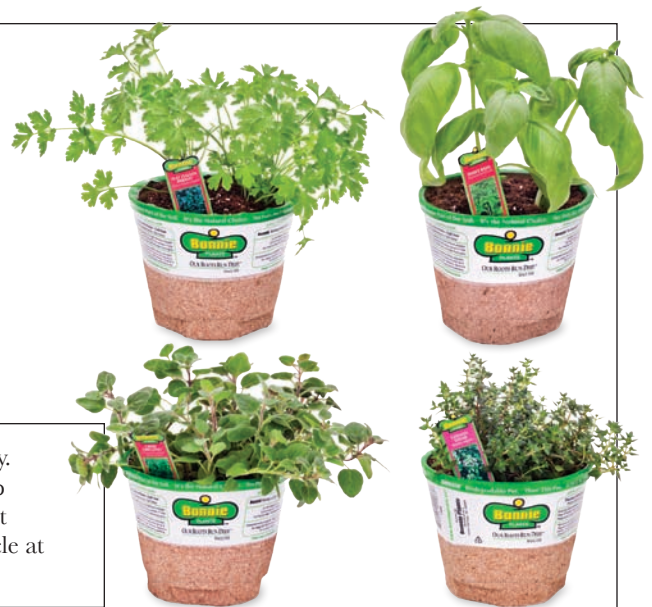


HERBS



FIRST THINGS FIRST. Your plants may arrive dry and thirsty.

Give them a drink, watering until the pot turns dark brown. Keep plants in a bright spot protected from cold, and plant after the last frost. Follow planting directions on the pot label or see the videos and article at bonnieplants.com/growing.



GETTING STARTED

Herbs are a staple for any kitchen garden or landscape. They can be grown in containers, as edging in landscape beds, or alongside vegetables in the garden. You have many creative options for incorporating these flavor-packed plants. Try planting herbs in strawberry pots with multiple openings, as the border in a flower bed, or in small pots for a sunny windowsill garden. Consult our comprehensive "Herbs" and "How to Grow" website sections for a wealth of information and

ideas. Here are a few of the herbs we offer, along with pointers to get you started:

Basil – Prized for its ease of growing and as a key ingredient in pesto, sweet basil is a must in any herb garden. A woody, branching plant, it is a warm weather annual that gets a boost in 80- to 90-degree weather.

Chives – Onion chives form neat, perennial, grass-like clumps that make great garden borders or container plants. The purple flowers are edible, too. Chives flourish in sun or partial shade.

Cilantro – This is a fast-growing annual that prefers the cooler temps of spring and fall. A bonus when the weather gets hot? The blooms produce seed pods that you can harvest as the spice called coriander.

Dill – Fernleaf dill is an All-America Selections winner prized for its foliage and seed. Give this compact variety a back-of-the-border spot or ample container space, as it can grow up to 24 inches tall. It will reseed for the next growing season if allowed.

Mint – Plant this creeper in a pot in the ground to keep it contained; it spreads easily via runners. Plant mint after your last frost date and in slightly damp or moist soil; do not let it dry out.

Oregano – No tomato sauce is complete without oregano! Use it as a ground cover, container plant, or in the garden, and harvest all season long. In zones 7 and farther south, it benefits from a little afternoon shade.

Parsley – Whether you prefer curly or flat, parsley is a lush plant that can grow up to a foot tall. Use it as a companion to annuals or perennials in beds, containers, and window boxes. Parsley tolerates frosts and light freezes. In the zones 7 and warmer, it survives through winter to bloom the following spring.

Sage – This strong, herbaceous perennial (zones 4 to 7) provides unique flavoring via its velvety, gray-green leaves. In the humid climes of zones 8 and farther south, it is usually an annual. Sage needs light, well-drained soil.

Thyme – This aromatic plant is an evergreen to semi-evergreen perennial for most parts of the country. In zones 9 or warmer, it is best treated as a cool season annual. Thyme needs excellent drainage, so consider mulching with gravel.



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HERBS



GROWING HERBS IN CONTAINERS

1 Place containers anywhere there is a source of water and sunshine. In hot climates, give them afternoon shade.

2 Choose containers with drainage holes and enough space to accommodate the roots as they grow.

3 Use a premium-quality potting mix. Don't use garden soil; it can be too dense and infested with disease or nematodes. After a year, empty the old potting mix (which will have lost its original texture) into a compost pile and replace it with new. In cool climates where decomposition is slower, a 2-year rotation is usually okay.

4 Before planting, mix timed-release fertilizer into the soil at the rate recommended on the label. Or, fertilize with Bonnie Herb, Vegetable & Flower Plant Food according to label directions.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Put heavy pots on casters to make it easier to move them around.
- Consider a spaghetti tube drip irrigation system if you have many pots clustered in a single area. It will make watering a breeze.
- Combine herbs according to their shapes so there is room for more than one in a pot. For example, pair upright rosemary with creeping

thyme. If the pot is large enough, you can add sage or chives, too.

- A large strawberry jar is a perfect vessel for compact herbs that you only use a pinch at a time. These include parsley, oregano, thyme, sage, and rosemary (in the top of the jar). See "Herbs Well-Suited to a Strawberry Jar" in the Container Gardening section of bonnieplants.com.
- In humid climates, use pea gravel as mulch in the pot to help improve drainage. It will also prevent soil from spattering on the leaves, which makes harvesting clean herbs a snap.

FERTILIZING

Feed regularly with Bonnie Herb, Vegetable & Flower Plant Food to keep plants healthy and vigorous. Your plants will love the naturally based formula made from oilseed extract. Apply every 1 to 2 weeks, following the label directions.

HARVESTING

In addition to their ornamental value, herbs have a delicious payoff. Here's some advice for clipping with confidence:

- **Before you start**, make sure your plants are well-watered. Healthy, happy herbs yield the best flavor. A few hours later (or the following morning), gather your gloves and cut with sharp clippers so you don't mangle the stems or accidentally yank out the plant. Have something in which to carry the clipped herbs, such as a bucket or large basket.
- **Perennial herbs** such as oregano, sage, and thyme are the simplest to harvest. Cut about one-third to one-half of the plant's height anytime during the growing season.
- **Basil and other annual herbs** grown for their leaves need regular harvesting during the summer to keep them from going to seed. Clipping lets them focus on growing leaves. By mid-summer, plants will be near their final height.
- **Harvest herb flowers** (edible herbs yield edible flowers) when the flowers have just opened. The heads will be firm and at maximum flavor. Handle them gently to minimize damage.

- **Gathering seeds** from dill, cilantro (seeds are known as coriander), and other herbs requires careful timing. Watch for the seeds to plump and turn brown. When that happens, clip the heads immediately or you will likely lose your harvest to hungry birds or high winds.

PRESERVING HERBS FOR COOKING

Lay cut herbs in a single layer on an absorbent towel placed on a flat surface. Allow them to air-dry for 6 to 8 days. Once the leaves become dry and crackly, store them in an airtight container away from light. Basil is okay dried, but doesn't hold its flavor as well as oregano, dill, and many other herbs.

When drying herbs, it's important to prevent mold. During the drying period, fluff the

herb stalks each day to expose new parts to the air. If you live in a hot and humid area, you may have best luck using a food dehydrator, which reduces the chance of mold.

You can count the rules for herb preservation on one hand: Water before you harvest, make sharp cuts, keep herbs clean, dry them quickly, and store them away from light and moisture. That's it!

RECIPES

Nothing beats a simple sandwich with fresh basil and tomato slices, but we bet you'll have so many herbs to harvest that you'll want more ideas. To view a variety of recipes for your freshly harvested herbs and other veggies, go to bonnieplants.com/cooking.

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