



STARNOTE 215
June 2009

GROWING HERBS IN THE DESERT

Versatile plants with many uses

Herbs are grown here and used for many different reasons. Culinary varieties add zest and flavor to hundreds of dishes. Medicinal herbs play a large role in healing and preventing disorders. Nearly all bring fragrance and beauty to the home and garden. From the cooking pot to the medicine chest, to potpourri and sachets, herbs are good for everyone! These versatile plants can be grown nearly anywhere—in movable patio gardens, window boxes, desert or traditional gardens. Due to the extreme heat of summer in Southern Nevada and even Utah, locating your garden where there is afternoon shade will allow the greatest variety, and best results.

This following listing of herbs is by no means all-inclusive but represents popular varieties frequently grown in our desert climate.

- ◆ **Arugula**
- ◆ **Basil**
- ◆ **Caraway**
- ◆ **Chamomile**
- ◆ **Chives**
- ◆ **Cilantro**
- ◆ **Dill**
- ◆ **Fennel**
- ◆ **Garlic**
- ◆ **Lavender**
- ◆ **Lemon Verbena**
- ◆ **Marjoram, Sweet**
- ◆ **Mint**
- ◆ **Oregano**
- ◆ **Parsley**
- ◆ **Rosemary**
- ◆ **Sage**
- ◆ **Savory**
- ◆ **Scented Geranium**
- ◆ **Shallots**
- ◆ **Tarragon**
- ◆ **Thyme**

[Selection and Care Information](#)

Arugula (annual). A smaller leafy plant with strong flavor. Easy to grow, and often planted with close spacing between plants. Do not delay harvesting as the plant will generate a toughness and overly strong flavor. Frequent irrigations are preferred because of shallow rooting. Provide good drainage.

Basil (annual). An important culinary herb with many uses. It comes in several varieties like Dark Opal, Lemon, and Sweet. All grow well in containers or gardens. Basil gives excellent flavor to tomato and fish dishes, poultry stuffing, cheeses, soups, stews and salad dressings. Pinch flower spikes and give afternoon shade. [\(top\)](#)

Caraway (annual). Known best for its seeds, this herb does better with afternoon shade. To harvest, pick flower heads and rub off seeds. Use dried seeds to flavor breads, soups, sauces, stews and salads or use over pork and sauerkraut. Some people eat seeds after meals to aid digestion.

Chamomile (perennial). Forms soft textured, 12-inch mat of green, aromatic leaves with small, daisy-like flowers in summer. Dried flower heads make a flavorful tea; good as potpourri. Plant in morning sun to light shade. [\(top\)](#)

Chives (perennial). Small, clump-forming onion relative. Grassy leaves and neat pink flowers give it ornamental as well as herbaceous use. Chop leaves or flowers for use as garnish or add to salads, vegetables, poultry, fish, soups, sauces, eggs or cheeses. Plant in full to part sun.

Cilantro (annual). Classic parsley-like herb used in Chinese, Thai and Mexican cooking. Unique flavor great for fresh salsas and various Asian dishes. Fresh version of Coriander. Prefers light shade. Bolts in hot weather, so plant in succession. [\(top\)](#)

Dill (annual). Fernlike herb to 2 x 2 feet has flat clusters of small, yellow flowers in summer; reseeds readily. Use leaves (best when fresh) and seeds in soups, salads, egg, fish, pork and poultry dishes. Renowned in pickling solutions! Best in morning sun or filtered shade. Seeds are said to aid in control of coughs, colds and flu.

Fennel (annual). Resembles Dill but coarser. Use leaves, stems and seeds to flavor many dishes including salads, fish, pork, sweet pickles and vegetables. Very drought tolerant. Grow in full sun with deep, infrequent water when established. [\(top\)](#)

Garlic (perennial bulb). One of the oldest and best known of culinary and medicinal herbs. Used to flavor nearly all foods. Harvest when leafy tops fall over. Elephant Garlic has very large bulb and mild flavor. Plant in full sun. Eat raw or use tincture to help with cold, flu, respiratory infections and other ills.

Lavender (perennial). Sweetly scented herb in many varieties grows in shrub form to 3 feet. Fragrant lavender or purple flowers are used in perfumes and sachets as well as flavoring cakes, cookies, black tea, fruits and eggs. Said to relieve headaches, insomnia and stress. Also used externally in baths. [\(top\)](#)

Lemon Verbena (perennial). Large, shrub-like herb to 4 feet or more is prized for its lemon-scented leaves. Use chopped leaves in potpourri, ice tea and jelly. Leggy by nature, it likes full sun. Protect from severe cold or grow as an annual.

Marjoram, Sweet (annual here). Bushy plant to 1 foot or more is a favorite herb for seasoning meats, salads, sausages and tomatoes. Fresh leaves can be used to polish furniture. Grow in full sun; keep blossoms cut off and plant trimmed to prevent woody growth. Marjoram tea is said to relieve colds, headaches and anxiety. [\(top\)](#)

Mint (perennial). Many varieties like Spearmint, Peppermint and Mint The Best provide delightful flavoring for lamb or fish, jellies, salads or teas. Very invasive! Best in containers or confined garden area to retain control. Full or part sun; keep flowers cut off. Among others, it has been used for indigestion, colds, flu or insomnia.

Oregano (perennial). Upright plant spreads by underground stems. Fresh or dried leaves give strong, zesty taste to tomato dishes, potatoes, mushroom dishes or marinades. Plant in full sun. Has been used for indigestion, coughs and headaches. [\(top\)](#)

Parsley (biennial treated as annual). Decorative plant makes attractive edging for herb, vegetable or flower gardens. Best when planted each year; prefers afternoon shade. Use fresh or dried as seasoning; fresh leaves make the perfect garnish and breath freshener. Stems and roots give a hint of licorice to soups and stews.

Rosemary (perennial). Intensely fragrant herb doubles as an attractive dry area landscape shrub. Use fresh or dried. Excellent with poultry, lamb, pork, stews, soups and vegetables. Give full sun and deep, infrequent water when established. Some use internally for sinus infections and colds; externally for bruises and wounds. [\(top\)](#)

Sage (evergreen perennial). Available in varieties like PINEAPPLE, PURPLE and GOLDEN. Has many culinary and medicinal uses. Use in cheese dishes, stuffing, soups, beans and peas. Used by many to aid digestion; tea is said to soothe coughs and colds. Makes an attractive landscape shrub; plant with rosemary. Give full sun, good drainage and deep, infrequent water when established. Some varieties like PINEAPPLE are frost tender.

Savory. Upright, globe-like plant to 18 inches can be substituted for Marjoram or Thyme in recipes. Excellent container plant. Use fresh or dried in meats, fish, eggs and green beans. Winter Savory is perennial but not as flavorful as its annual Summer Savory counterpart. Plant in full to part sun. [\(top\)](#)

Scented Geranium (perennial with winter protection). Ornamental herb comes in many flavors like lemon, apple, chocolate and lime. Use leaves in sachets, for flavoring sauces, jellies, or scenting finger bowls. Excellent container or garden subject. Plant like other geraniums. Best with afternoon shade. Protect from frost and freezing.

Shallots (annual). Small, onion-like plant produces clusters of edible bulbs from a single, "mother" bulb. Prized for distinctive flavor it gives to stews, vegetables and a host of other dishes. Plant in spring and harvest in fall, or plant in fall and harvest in spring. Give full to part sun. [\(top\)](#)

Tarragon (perennial). Large plant to 2 feet spreads by creeping underground rhizomes. It's dormant in winter and good for containers. Divide every 2-3 years to keep vigorous. Great with meat, eggs, poultry and seafood dishes. Good in full or part sun.

Thyme (evergreen perennial). Available in many varieties, all with culinary uses. Great for casseroles, stews and soups. Use with eggs, potatoes, fish and green vegetables. Plant in full sun; water deeply and infrequently when established. Prune tips to shape and keep neat. [\(top\)](#)

Selection and Care Information

The best selection of herbs is found at Star Nursery in spring and fall. Annual varieties may be grown nearly year round in portable containers or the yard. Perennial varieties, due to their ultimate size will do best when planted in the landscape, or large raised planters. During times of exceptionally hot or cold weather, bring your portable herb gardens indoors to extend the life and productivity of your plants.

Except as noted, plant your herbs in rich, well-drained soil and give them regular water. Paydirt™ Planting Mix is an excellent soil amendment for ground level gardens and larger raised planters. For smaller planters and pots use Filthy Rich™ potting soil.

Be sure to add Dr. Q's® Gold Dust Starter Fertilizer at planting time. Fertilize regularly with Dr. Q's® Vegetable Food throughout the growing season for continuous, controlled production. For more information on herbs and their uses, get a copy of Ortho's® All About Herbs from your favorite Star Nursery location. [\(top\)](#)

Words of caution: When using fresh herbs or encapsulated and liquid herb tinctures for medicinal purposes, consult books on the subject and follow instructions and label directions exactly.