

Let's Talk Herbs



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Herbs need at least 6 hours of sunlight per day just as your vegetables do. Sometimes it will work just fine to plant the herbs in your vegetable garden. Even better for Tahoe gardeners is to put them in pots among your vegetables. Thus the edible garden is complete.

You may want to fertilize herbs once or twice per season with a low nitrogen, organic fertilizer.

Herbs need pruning, or rather cutting for use, to help them grow efficiently and maintain a pleasing shape.

Only a few herbs will be perennial in our Tahoe climate so you will be removing them at the end of the season to grow indoors or just discard as compost.

Planning

You will need to first choose your location for them to receive enough sun. If you want an easy care garden for full sun choose thyme, oregano, French tarragon and chives. Chives may need a little more watering than the others. Basil is also popular for herb gardens but will do better for sure in a pot as it requires richer soil and more water.



Herbs can be grown from seed and are best started indoors early in the season but the most reliable result would be to buy the young nursery transplants. You could put them out in pots by mid-June but cover or bring them in when cold nights threaten; or wait until nearer the end of June if you want to plant them in the ground.





Another consideration in determining your planting location are your microclimates. Be sure to check out where your plants may be sheltered from wind and if you have stone walls or benches or any other masonry work near the planting area as this may provide extra warmth.

Get the Soil Ready

Now that you have chosen your planting spot it's time to get your soil ready. You will want to spread at least 4-5 inches of compost over the soil area and work it into the top of your planting area. If you have purchased nursery containers, gently nudge your seedling out by tipping over the container and tapping the bottom so the plant will fall out into your other waiting hand. Plant it firmly in the soil and leave a small watering trough around it in the soil. Water it thoroughly and then lay 2-3 inches of mulch. Make sure to put a label stick nearby as you will forget which plants are which when it comes time to select for cooking. Hand water regularly during the first week. If you have a drip system that can take over the water needs or start to lessen your hand watering slightly after the first week. You should only need to water once a week for the rest of the season except for basil and chives which will require a little more water.



Using Containers

If you have chosen to use containers for your herb growing, keep several points in mind.

- Use larger pots than you might think for the size of your nursery plant (18" diameter at least). Make sure the pots have drainage holes and cover the hole with window screening or some type of screen material rather than a pot shard or gravel. Larger containers will allow for more soil and give the plants room to spread so they will require less water.
- Use a soil mix specially formulated for growing in containers, not your regular bag of garden soil.
- Containers will require some fertilizing. Use organic fertilizer such as a fish emulsion or other slow-release fertilizer.
- Keep a close eye on water needs and hand watering will be required.



Further Resources:

For more details on various herbs use the following resources:

The Edible Herb Garden, Rosalind Creasy, Periplus, 1999.

The Joy of Growing Herbs and Vegetables in Pots

<http://ucanr.edu/sites/mgfresno/files/249668.pdf>

Growing Herbs for the Kitchen

<http://ucanr.edu/sites/ucmgnapa/files/153880.pdf>

Perennial Herbs for Cold Climates

<http://www.farnorthgarden.com/2009/03/perennial-herbs-for-cold-climates.html>

Grow Herbs

http://sacmg.ucanr.edu/grow_herbs/

Landscaping with Herbs

<http://sacmg.ucanr.edu/files/116769.pdf>

Environmental Horticulture Notes

<http://sacmg.ucanr.edu/files/116768.pdf>

Watch for more information on harvesting your herbs and their many uses in upcoming Master Gardener newsletters.