

Most gardeners like to grow at least a few of their own herbs. Many go so far as to create their own dedicated herb gardens. There are a wide variety of herbs that can easily be grown. You will need to use more of a fresh herb than if you were using the dried version. Some opinions are to use only slightly more, while others insist it should be closer to three times more. Your own personal tastes will dictate which end of the scale you prefer. Just a quick note: if you are growing cilantro, DO NOT plant it in close proximity to Fennel, but Do grow it near anise. If you are growing Anise, DO NOT grow it near basil, carrots or rue. There are many on-line sites providing advise for “companion planting”. Some seed houses or suppliers will even print this information on their packets.

Many perennial herbs will survive our winters, mulch them in the Fall, and they’ll grow again in the Spring. (Chive, garlic chive, comfrey, lovage, regular mint, sometimes sage, sorrel, burnet, and thyme come to mind). Parsley is Biennial, meaning it will re-grow the following year, but if it comes up the third year, it will bolt to seed. Dill will re-seed itself if left to fully mature in the garden. Some gardeners have reported that their parsley grows like a perennial (as well as perennials zoned 4 – even 5). In these cases, the roots have not experienced the full extent of our winter temperatures because they have been planted right up against a basement wall in a south-facing sheltered location, or over a septic tank. The ‘hardiness zone’ is actually artificially higher in these spots.

Herbs that are not hardy in our zone can be grown as annuals, or, in pots, allowing you to easily bring them indoors in a sunny location, to continue growing. Prune them back at this time and perhaps re-pot with fresh soil. This practice will also help to keep any insects etc that may be in the leaves or soil from moving into the house with the plant. Be prepared for them to grow tall and spindly since the amount of natural sunlight in the winter is not sufficient for proper growth. They will survive however, and you *will* have fresh herbs to snip all winter. Using a grow light during this time works well. Try to give them 16 hours of artificial light per day. When the weather warms, the herb can be repotted with fresh earth, and returned outdoors for the summer. Remember, like all potted plants, attention must be given to fertilizing, since the plants will use up all the nutrients in the soil in the pot. Many herbs are NOT heavy feeders, adding some fertilizer when repotting may often be sufficient. Heavy applications of fertilizers may produce large plants, but the essential oils that produce their flavor and aroma will be greatly reduced. Additional fertilizer can be applied if the plants lose their color or look a little peaked during the growing season.

You can harvest, and dry or freeze your herbs for later use. Many are very quick and easy to freeze (parsley, chervil, chive, basil, oregano, rosemary, lovage, mint, sage, tarragon, thyme). Just harvest the herb, put in a freezer bag, and use like “fresh” in the winter. Some herbs (Mints, Bay Laurel, Stevia, Rosemary, Lemongrass and Wheatgrass, come to mind) are often grown as full-time house plants, although they would benefit from spending the warmer months outdoors in a sunny, sheltered location. Drying the herbs, (by hanging up-side down, in a low oven, in the microwave or in a dehydrator) is preferred by many. Be sure the herb is completely dry, and store in an airtight opaque container, in a cool dry location.

Some herbs can literally take over your herb garden after a couple of years. Regular mint, horseradish, and comfrey are three such culprits. These should be grown so their roots can be contained; in a pot; or in a location that you won’t be upset if it spreads. Getting rid of these once they have “moved-in” can prove quite difficult.

More at www.fallfair.info