

Prince Edward County Master Gardeners



A Cook's Herb Garden

A home garden would not be complete without a herb garden. For many gardeners the herb garden is the central focus of their garden. A herb garden supplies not only herbs for cooking but herbs for healing the body and, with the beautiful blooms of so many herbs, herbs for the soul.

The herb garden, especially if it is intended as a source of herbs for cooking, should be placed within easy access of the kitchen. The design of a kitchen herb garden can be complex or simple and any number of materials can be used in its construction. My own herb garden (seen below) was built with rocks many years ago and is laid out in a spiral. It is in full sun right out the back kitchen door. It is watered from the top and the plants that do not need much moisture are planted at the top, the water runs down and the plants with more water requirements are lower down.



The rocks retain the heat absorbed during the day which helps to insulate the garden at night. The spiral design makes the garden easy to access from all sides and creates microclimates allowing a diverse range of herbs with varying growing needs to be grown in a compact space. Plants such as rosemary, oregano and thyme are placed at the top, basil, which needs full sun and moist soil, is planted mid way, as well as cilantro/coriander. Near the bottom of the spiral plants such as mint (a highly invasive plant that is in a pot dug into the ground to keep it from spreading beyond its boundaries), parsley and chives.

Many gardeners and cooks like to have a few potted herbs on their back porch so they can nip outside and just pinch off a sprig while they're cooking. My husband, who is a bit of a guerrilla gardener, likes to mix his herbs in with the vegetable and ornamental gardens. In our garden it's not unusual to find a coriander plant beside your Siberian Irises - even though you have no recollection of planting that coriander!

Suggestions for a Cook's Herb Garden might include:

I've included the botanical name for you as well.

Basil	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>
Bergamot	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>
Burnet – Salad Burnet	<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>
Chamomile	<i>Matricaria recutita</i>
Chives	<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>
Coriander	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>
Dill	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>
Fennel Bronze	<i>Foeniculum vulgare 'Bronze'</i>
Marjoram	<i>Origanum majorana</i>
Mint	<i>Mentha Spicata</i>
Oregano	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>
Parsley	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>
Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>
Sage (Tricolour)	<i>Salvia officinalis 'Tricolor'</i>
French Tarragon	<i>Artemisia dracunculus</i>
Thyme	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>

Herbs should always be picked early in the morning when the dew has lifted and the essential oils are at their peak on a dry day. According to Master Gardener and Herb Expert Barbra Stock, the best way to dry herbs is in the oven at a very low temperature on trays. Leave the herbs until they are dried and transfer them to a dark, air tight container, maintaining the fullest size of the leaves. Crush them as you use them.

When using herbs for cooking use twice as much fresh as dried and always harvest herbs with sharp scissors.

Have you ever wondered what's the difference between a herb and a spice?

Herbs are grown in a more moderate climate, the plants are seasonal and the fresh leaves, roots and flowers are used. Spices are mostly grown in hot climates and the seeds, stems, twigs, bark (such as cinnamon) are used. Saffron is the world's most expensive spice.

Submitted by Ren Duinker

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