

# Herbs Make Scents



Come see the animals in our gardens!

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In the Virginia Zoo Herb Garden, plants are arranged by human usage for educational purposes, but these herbs are often harvested for animal treats. Rosemary is the tigers' herb of choice. Monkeys go ape over fennel!

Herbs flavor our foods, perfume our homes, color our clothing, heal our bodies, and enliven our gardens. The leaves from non-woody plants such as parsley, thyme, basil, rosemary, and sage offer us a combination of beauty and usefulness. In cooking, spices are similar to herbs, but they come from other dried parts of plants such as the seeds (mustard), roots (garlic), bark (cinnamon), buds (clove), fruit (black pepper), etc.

## To Grow Herbs:

1. Select a sunny location- 6 hours minimum.
2. Plant in well-drained soil with compost added. (Compost can be added to container plantings, too, for healthier plants.)
3. Water thoroughly when needed (can be often in small containers, especially clay).
4. Fertilize lightly with organic fertilizers to enhance essential oil production and therefore increase scent and flavor.
5. Wash off or hand-pick insect pests. Do not use pesticides.

## To Harvest:

1. Gather in the morning after the dew has dried. Flavor is at its peak right before flowering.
2. Shape the plant as you gather. Harvesting is a form of pruning and will keep the plant growing and thick.

## To Process:

1. Store clean, fresh stems of herbs in a glass of water, lightly tented with plastic, in the refrigerator.
2. Dry bunches of clean herbs on their stems by wrapping them with a rubber band and hanging them to dry in a well-ventilated, shaded place. Once dried, crumble the leaves and store them away from sun, heat, and moisture. (Not beside the stove!) Use within a year.
3. Freeze herbs such as parsley, dill, mint, sage, and oregano by sealing them in a plastic freezer bag after they have been washed and patted dry. Can be frozen on a cookie sheet then bagged.
4. Puree fresh herb leaves with water, soup stock, or oil then freeze in ice cube trays.
5. Store in freezer bags and add to soups or stews as desired.

# Herbs Make Scents cont.

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## To Use:

1. Fresh herbs: Use 2 x dried amount called for in recipe. Use about 2 teaspoons of minced, fresh herbs for 4 servings. Rub whole leaves between your hands to release the flavor. Don't cook too long! Add in the last 10-20 minutes of cooking. Amount might need to be increased in uncooked dishes.
2. Dried herbs: Use about 1 teaspoon for 4 portions. Maximize flavor by rubbing the herbs between your hands, soaking them in a liquid ingredient, or rubbing them into meats.

## Other Possibilities:

1. Herb vinegar: Pack a glass container with fresh, dry, hand crushed herbs. Fill the jar with white, cider, rice, or wine vinegar. Put in warm place, and shake it daily for 1-2 weeks. Strain it through a coffee filter into a decorative bottle. A sprig of fresh herb can be added for interest. Use this like regular vinegar on salads, vegetables, etc.
2. Herb oil: Perishable, so make in small batches. Soak DRIED herbs in canola or olive oil. Garlic can be added, but it spoils easily. Use in stir-fry, browning meats, etc. Store in the refrigerator.
3. Herb butter: Grind fresh herbs with butter or margarine. Store in the refrigerator.
4. Herb sugar or salt: Grind herbs with sugar (mint, for example) or salt (try rosemary).
5. Herb tea: Pour boiling water over 1 tablespoon of fresh herbs. Steep no more than 10 minutes. Tea should be light colored. Strain before drinking or use a tea ball to hold the herbs.

## Websites:

- <http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/envirohort/426-420/426-420.html>
- <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/SavoryHerbs/SavoryHerbs.html>

## Books:

- *Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs*
- *Southern Herb Growing* by Madeline Hill, Gwen Barclay, Jean Hardy