



Enjoy Fresh Herbs all Winter Long

The season for growing herbs on your sunny patio may be over, but you can still have fresh herbs for your favorite recipes. Give them what they need ó a sunny spot, well-drained soil and the correct amount of water and fertilizer ó and many herbs are easy to grow indoors.

Begin by purchasing new plants. The journey inside is not easy for herbs that have spent the summer outdoors. They will suffer as they try to adjust to a new location. Insects may also try to hitch a ride inside, and those pests are best left outdoors.

Pot herbs in well-drained potting mix in containers slightly larger than the ones in which they were grown. Only use pots with holes in the bottom for drainage. Water them generously and then, for most herbs, wait until the soil is dry to the touch before watering again. If leaves start to yellow, check the soil before watering. Most often this is the first sign of too much, not too little, water.

Herbs love the sun. Set them in a sunny window that receives at least four hours of direct sunlight; five to six is better. Turn pots each week to ensure uniform growth.

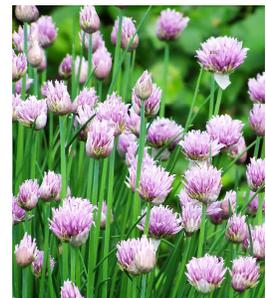
Fertilize herbs lightly with an all-purpose liquid fertilizer, fish emulsion or a granular fertilizer worked into the soil. Organic options are preferred. In December stop fertilizing altogether. As days start lengthening, begin feeding again. It is better to under- instead of over-fertilize. Herbs are easily killed with too much kindness.

The best defense against diseases and insect pests is to give herbs the best possible growing conditions. Keep a lookout for problems ó early detection will make it easier to manage common pests like aphids, spider mites and whiteflies. If these marauders are spotted, insecticidal soap is often effective. Plants can be dunked upside down in a container of insecticidal soap, or it can be sprayed directly on leaves. Spray in the evening so sunlight doesn't burn treated leaves. Always remember to wash treated leaves before cooking with them.

Some herbs are easier to grow than others ó consider starting with these.

Chives

Rating a 10 on the easy-to-grow scale, chives require less light and will tolerate a bit more moisture than other herbs. Whenever a craving for their mild onion flavor strikes, simply snip a bunch of their grass-like stems.



Mints

Mints are vigorous growers, outdoors and indoors. If lack of adequate light is stopping you from growing herbs inside, try mint. Grow several varieties so you will have just the right flavor for cooking lamb or fish dishes, creating a fruit salad or enjoying a mojito.

Oregano

Oregano requires the most light of these easy-to-grow herbs ó six to eight hours is best ó so provide supplemental lighting if direct sunlight is insufficient. Oregano prefers to have leaves harvested often; the plant will remain bushier and new growth will quickly appear. Oregano is tasty in a large variety of meat and fish recipes, vegetables and, of course, spaghetti sauce.

Parsley

Both curly-leaf and flat-leaf types of parsley perform admirably indoors. A bit slow-growing, a little patience for the first harvest will be required. Cutting outer leaves encourages new growth at the center of the plant.

Grow curly-leaf parsley for its pretty, frilly foliage and use as a garnish; and flat-type parsley for its bolder flavor with a hint of licorice.



Rosemary

There are many varieties of rosemary, but choose one of the more compact types for growing indoors. They struggle when over-watered so make sure the soil has dried before watering. To reduce the possibility of powdery mildew, make sure rosemary plants have good air circulation. Harvest sprigs by cutting just above where they meet stems, and never harvest more than a third of the plant at a time. Rosemary is delicious with meat, fish and chicken and a wide variety of vegetables.

Thyme

Another sun-lover, thyme may need supplemental light. When there are plenty of leaves, cut a bunch of stems and remove the leaves. Trim off flowers as they appear ó it will encourage more foliage growth. Chopped or whole, they are tasty in soups, stews, chicken dishes and lots more.

You don't have to go without fresh herbs for your favorite recipes when the snow flies ó grow herbs indoors and enjoy the taste of summer all winter long!



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