



Caring for Herbs

BASIL

Keep your Basil in the sunniest spots you can find, preferably a south-facing windowsill or patio (once there is no risk of frost). Water sparingly and remove flower spikes. If these are allowed to mature your plant will stop growing new leaves. Pick individual leaves from the top of the plant and give a liquid feed afterwards. Then leave to grow again.

BAY

Bay tolerates both sun and shade, and will grow in any soil providing it is not too wet. Position in a sheltered spot as leaves can be scorched by cold winds. Clip plants into shape if necessary in June or July. Bay is an ideal container plant as it is only moderately hardy, so growing it in a pot makes for easier winter protection. In the autumn move your bay to a greenhouse or wrap the pot in bubble wrap or hessian. Fresh leaves have a stronger flavour than dried.

CHIVES

Chives like a rich, moist soil in a fairly sunny position. Ensure pot-grown chives are well watered so they produce fresh leaves. The pom-pom flowers produced in summer are also edible. Chives die right back in winter but you can pot some up in September to grow on a sunny window sill. To use, cut the leaves with sharp scissors about 1cm from ground level. Add chives at the end of cooking or their flavour will disappear.

CORIANDER

Well-drained soil in a sunny spot is essential. If growing indoors on a window sill, give it plenty of light and don't over-water. Keep picking mature leaves as and when you need them. Regular cropping should delay flowering. If you want the seeds for cooking, allow the plants to flower letting the seeds set. The seed is ripe when it stops smelling unpleasant!

DILL

This is best sown from seed as it does not like having its roots disturbed. It needs a warm sunny site. Sew it either in the ground or in a large container. Follow the instructions on the seed packet. Protect your plants from strong winds and support them with twiggy sticks. Pick leaves fresh whenever you need them.

FENNEL

Fennel likes a moist but well drained soil that is deep enough for its long taproot. Remove the flat heads of tiny yellow flowers that appear in summer before they shed their seeds to prevent them self-seeding. Cut down the dead stems in early spring as new growth appears. Divide every three to four years. Pick the feathery young leaves and young stems as required. The ripe seeds can be used for flavouring sauces, bread and fish dishes.

MINT

Mint is an ideal candidate for container growing, as it can be invasive. It prefers moist soil and light sun to shade. Remove flowers to stop it from self-seeding and feed with a weak liquid fertiliser occasionally. Pick fresh leaves throughout the growing season.

OREGANO

This likes a warm sunny spot with light, well-drained soil/compost. Do not over water and give variegated types some shade at midday. Cut back after flowering and feed with liquid fertiliser. Pick the leaves whenever you need them.

PARSLEY

Parsley prefers damp soil in partial shade. Protect it from slugs and if carrot fly is a problem protect with fine mesh. Parsley is hardy but will produce fewer leaves in winter if left outside, so move potted plants indoors or to the greenhouse to give you fresh leaves in the winter. Parsley can be picked continuously and will constantly produce new growth. Give liquid feed occasionally.

ROSEMARY

Rosemary needs a sunny sheltered position in well-drained soil. If growing in a container, add some grit to the compost to aid drainage and don't over-water. After flowering, trim into shape and feed. Rosemary can be harvested all year round.

SAGE

Sage needs a well-drained, fertile soil in a sunny spot. If your soil is a little heavy, dig in some grit before planting. Do this also if you are growing it in a container. Cut back in March to about 15cm above ground level. This will prevent it from becoming leggy. Fresh leaves can be picked at any time before flowering.

TARRAGON

There are two types of tarragon, French and Russian. French has the superior flavour; it is fairly slow growing so you will need several plants for a decent crop of leaves. Sunshine and well-drained soil are essential. Plant on its own in a container as it is easily swamped by more vigorous plants. Move to a frost-free place in winter and water sparingly. Cut the top third of the stems for use in the kitchen.

THYME

All varieties of thyme like a warm, sunny site in well drained soil that is low in nutrients. Add grit to the planting hole or container. Trim after flowering to keep neat and encourage new growth. They will need replacing every three years or so. To harvest, snip off twiggy stems as you need them and strip off the leaves. Or hang in bunches to dry and then store in an airtight container.

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