

Start An Indoor Culinary Herb Garden

Fresh herbs are expensive to buy, and you must use them in a day or two after purchasing them. The solution is to grow your own. Growing herbs inside add a touch of green to your life and flavor to your plate. Many herbs can be successfully grown indoors.

Which herbs to grow is probably the most difficult thing. Think about the meals you cook and the herbs you repeatedly use.

Choosing the right herbs is key for successful indoor gardening. Some herbs thrive in containers, while others struggle. Grow each herb species in its own container, as it is difficult to create the best-growing conditions for multiple species of herbs in a single container. Great options for your indoor herb garden include basil, chives, cilantro, mint, oregano, parsley, and thyme.

Most herbs need 6 hours of direct sunlight. Either place herbs in a sunny location, for example, near a window with a southern exposure, or place herbs 6 to 12 inches from two 40-watt, cool white fluorescent bulbs for 14 to 16 hours.

Herbs not exposed to their preferred light conditions will become thin and spindly, produce smaller leaves, and have a reduced aroma. If you grow plants on windowsills, rotate pots often so that each side gets enough light for uniform growth.

The typical temperatures found indoors are ideal for herbs. Keep herbs in rooms with temperatures of at least 65 to 70°F during the day and 55 to 60°F at night.

Growing each herb in a separate container makes it easy to care for its individual needs. Plant and grow herbs in containers with a drainage hole and in a potting mix that will aid water drainage.

Your containers should be at least 6 inches in diameter and 6 inches deep. Basil and parsley have deep roots, so a taller container will let them stretch out. Try to aim for at least 12 inches deep.

A quality sterile potting mix is best for indoor planting. Don't use garden soil in the containers. Use a good potting soil mixture. Mint, chives, and parsley need more moisture-holding materials in the mix, so compost and vermiculite should be added to improve moisture retention.

Rosemary, thyme, and oregano prefer fast-draining. Add some extra sand, perlite, or fine gravel for extra drainage.

Always check the soil before watering. Use your finger to ensure the soil is dry for at least an inch down before watering, as most herbs do not tolerate wet soils. Water the plant thoroughly with warm water until the water comes out of the pot's drainage hole. Allow the pot to drain completely, discarding the run-off before returning it to its place.

Most herbs need additional humidity to grow indoors. Mist the herbs every few days.

Fertilize herbs with a low dose of water-soluble fertilizer every 2 weeks. Fertilizing herbs more often may negatively affect the herb's aroma and taste.

Most herbs do well with periodic snipping as they are needed. Leafy annual herbs, like basil, chervil, and parsley, can be cut back severely when harvested. Cut just above a leaf or pair of leaves using a sharp knife or pruning shears. Leave approximately 4 to 6 inches of the stem for later growth. Do not cut back leafy perennial herbs as heavily as annual herbs. On perennials, such as chives, mint, oregano, and thyme, remove the top one-third of growth.

Incorporating fresh herbs is a quick and easy way to add flavor to some of your favorite dishes. Herbs can invigorate meals to be tasty without having to add more salt.