



Pot Up Some Herbal Pleasure

ABOVE: Herbs are great fillers in pots and window boxes. Here variegated sage matches the white wooden box and window frame. **RIGHT:** A pot of basil, parsley and thyme works perfectly on a patio, deck or balcony.





Herbs for Containers

Annual Herbs

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)
 Cilantro/Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*)
 Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)
 Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

Perennial Herbs

Thyme (*Thymus* spp.)
 Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)
 Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)
 Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
 Tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculoides*)
 Lavender (*Lavandula* spp.)
 Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)
 Mint (*Mentha* spp.)

ABOVE: Parsley and oregano, two staple herbs, crowd a small pot. Your tomato sauce will have great flavor.

Growing herbs in pots provides a wonderful opportunity to garden without a backyard space. Many gardeners who are not interested in caring for a garden decide to use pots to embellish their decks and offer a view of combined color and texture from inside the house. Mixing pots of herbs, vegetables and flowers brings nature right up to your door and draws you outdoors. Butterflies will find the nectar. Add water for the birds and the scene will be even better.

The hot sunny days of summer provide perfect growing conditions for herbs. One of the joys of the season is stepping barefoot out of the house onto a warm concrete stoop, paver patio or deck to cut herbs for a recipe. I hold stems before cutting with a scissor. My hands brush the leaves and wonderful scents fill the air and stay on my hands. Giving the pots a shower adds to the sensory enjoyment with the sound of the water hitting the leaves and the brightness of the water sparkling in the sun.

Garden centers in the spring offer numerous varieties of annual and perennial herbs in small pots. Mail order catalogs offer wide selection, too. Make a list of herbs you like and add a couple you have not used before.

Annual Herbs

Annual herbs to grow include parsley, basil, coriander/cilantro and dill. We usu-

ally grow dill from seed. Parsley grows vigorously and will continue supplying leaves even after a couple of frosts.

Basil is very tender, so if you have planted early cover or bring inside if the temperatures dip. Many types of basil are available: sweet, purple, lemon, lime and large leaf. I love the simple sweet basil and grow it for making and freezing pesto sauce.

Coriander and dill go to seed mid-summer, so you may need to replant them, or put something else in the pots perhaps a mum when it becomes available. Planting herbs from seed is possible, but, since we do not need rows of plants, seed packets hold many more than we will need.

Perennial Herbs

Perennial herbs, such as thyme, oregano, sage, rosemary and tarragon flavor dishes from all over the world. Try to buy larger sizes than the annuals because these plants will not grow as fast.

You need to be willing to toss them at the end of the season (after harvesting all of the leaves) unless you or a friend can plant them in a garden. Rosemary is not winter hardy in Iowa, so try to bring it in the house to grow as a house plant.

Mint is an aggressive perennial and should always be grown in a pot. I like to buy a pot of lavender, even though I have had trouble growing it in the ground. The flower is beautiful and the scent amazing. One year I wondered why my lavender had

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ABOVE: Group pots together for a showier display. Here, a variegated thyme (left), sage, mint and oregano (rear) add textures and scent in a sunny spot. **RIGHT:** A strawberry pot is one way to grow several herbs in a small container. Here, rosemary, sage and basil are planted in the top and thyme and oregano in pockets.



not bloomed. I found out that my husband had been clipping it to use while cooking!

Add a pot of chives and it's easy to add a mild onion flavor to salads and soups without having to cut up an onion. Keep the pot by a kitchen window or on a cold porch in the winter.

Potting Up

I usually plant one kind of herb in a pot because harvesting is easier. Different growth habits and rates can allow one herb to overwhelm another if planted in the same pot. You can create combinations

by clustering pots. Terra cotta pots always look fine, but I find that glazed pots help retain moisture and I love the colors.

The annual herbs need more water than the perennials, which, in general, prefer free draining soil. For this reason perennial herbs do better in pots or a raised bed than in the ground.

Potting Mix

Use a soilless, lightweight potting mix. The pots must have a drain hole in the bottom. These mixes frequently have a slow release fertilizer in them, but after

a couple weeks start adding fertilizer at half strength to the watering can once a week. You may need to water the pots twice on hot, windy days. Check the soil moisture by putting your finger into the pot. I use saucers to protect the surfaces from staining. Be sure to empty them, especially after a rain.

Acclimate Plants

Leave your newly purchased plants outside in partial sun in flats for a few days before planting so that they acclimate to being outside. Greenhouse con-



LEFT: This culinary mix will fit into the smallest outdoor space. The three upright herbs, rosemary, sage and chives, reach toward the sun.

pot, gently tap it to the ground to settle the planting and soil. If the post is too heavy to lift, rock it back and forth to settle the soil.

It will take about a week for the herbs to perk up and look settled. Then, they will grow quickly and provide you with flavor and beauty.

Harvesting

Use a scissor to cut leaves or stems, trying not to take all of the harvest from one spot. Each time you cut, make your way around the pot so all parts of the plant have been trimmed.

This will keep the plants from setting seed. After setting seed the plants produce fewer leaves and may not taste as good. Once cut, I rinse the leaves with a spray of water in the kitchen sink and then lay them on towels to dry. Their scent permeates the room. ♡

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ditions are quite protective. Keep them watered during this time.

When planting, put the plants on a tarp or piece of plastic to contain the spilled soil, pots and bits of plants. Work close to where the pots will be placed because they may be heavy and hard to move.

Play with the plant arrangement until you find one you like. I tend to plant quite closely in the pots. With daily watering and fertilizing, the plants will be fine.

Fill the pots about halfway with the potting mixture. Remove the plants from the plastic pots they came in by turning the pot upside down and gently pushing on the bottom. Clasp the plant or allow it to fall in your hand. Some of the lightweight plastic pots can be torn open. Try to recycle the pots.

Root Side Down

Place the plant with its root ball in the pot, setting the plants about 4 inches apart. Perennials herbs need more space. Carefully add soil, firming the soil around the pots.

Water with a gentle spray. Once the soil settles, add more. Fill to 1 inch of the top of the pot to leave room for water to sit until it is absorbed. If you can lift the



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