

## Growing your own herbs



Growing herbs doesn't have to be difficult, and you don't need to be green fingered to do it. Its great fun for all the family and at the end of your growing you'll have a beautiful plant, as well as a useful medicinal (and maybe edible) herb with many uses.

You also don't need to have lots of room to grow herbs, most herbs are happy growing in pots, and they can be grown either indoors e.g. on a sunny windowsill or outside on a patio/balcony.

### Growing herbs from starter plants

A good way to start herb growing is to buy one that's already started, you can get these from garden centres and specialist herb suppliers (see suppliers at the end for some suggestions). **Remember to check the Latin name of the herb, you must have the medicinal variety and not the ornamental variety.**

**It is important to buy organic plants so that chemicals do not contaminate your medicine/food.**




Once the herb is established you will need to repot it into a larger pot, ensure you have the correct soil type and drainage for your herb. You can find this information out from herb growing books (see references for more info).




Herbs also love hanging baskets, so why not try chamomile, thyme or sage in your next hanging basket.

### **Growing herbs from seed**

Growing herbs from seed may seem daunting but here are some tips:




- Sow your seeds in a light soil so that the plants can germinate and push through.
- As a rule of thumb a seed should be planted at the depth of 3 times its length, so this is hardly anything for very fine seeds.
- Sow your seeds over a large area, e.g. a seed tray to maximise growth.
- Seeds need to be kept warm to germinate (although not too warm), keep your soil damp and in a nice warm place while the seeds germinate. Don't be discouraged if this doesn't happen right away, some herbs need up to 6 weeks to germinate (e.g. Echinacea).
- Once your seedlings are growing and reach 2 – 3cm in height, you will need to thin them out, this allows the stronger plants to grow. You will need to repot the seedlings into small pots.
- In the warmer months some herbs you can sow directly into the ground, check the information about each herb for more info.
- It is important to use organic seeds so that they do not contain chemicals that will enter your food/medicine.

Herb	Growing from seed	Culinary uses	Medicinal uses
Fennel ( <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> ) 	Can be sown in autumn or spring. Germinate at warm temperatures.  Fennel is less fussy about soil type but does like the sun.	The leaves, bulb and seeds are used in cooking, bringing an aniseed flavour to dishes.	Fennel leaves and seeds help to settle an upset stomach.
Yarrow ( <i>Achillea millefolium</i> ) 	Grow from seed over winter and plant out in Spring (April), plant 20-30cm apart. Yarrow is not fussy about soil type.  Do not sew directly into the garden.	Young leaves can be added to salads.	Used to reduce fevers and heal wounds.
Borage ( <i>Borago officinalis</i> ) 	Borage germinates quickly; the seeds can be grown in small pots and then planted out.  Plant 60cm apart.  Grow in well drained, light soil in the sun.	The leaves can be used in salads and the flowers are traditionally added to Pimms. They can also be added to salads.	Borage was traditionally used to bring courage. Try a cup of borage tea to relax after a hard day. It combines beautifully with limeflower and lemon balm for a night time tea.

<p>Calendula (or pot marigold) (<i>Calendula officinalis</i>)</p> 	<p>Sow seeds in winter and plant out in Spring directly into the ground or pot, in a light soil.</p> <p>A favourite of slugs! You will need to be vigilant!</p>	<p>Young leaves can be added to salads. Flower petals can be used to colour dishes such as rice or in cakes.</p>	<p>Calendula is a wound healer and is excellent at reducing scarring. It makes a really beautiful ointment.</p>
<p>Caraway (<i>Carum carvi</i>)</p> 	<p>The seeds can be sown directly into the soil (either pot or garden) in the spring (April). Use a well-drained soil with plenty of sun.</p>	<p>Caraway seeds are a common ingredient in many dishes, both savoury and sweet.</p>	<p>Medicinally caraway seeds, roots and leaves are used to settle upset stomachs.</p>
<p>Chamomile (<i>Matricaria recutita</i>)</p> 	<p>Grow from seed in trays in the spring and then plant out once a medium sized plant.</p> <p>Use well drained soil.</p>	<p>Chamomile is rather bitter and so tends not to be used in cookery.</p>	<p>Chamomile is a very versatile medicine, from teas for digestion and relieving bloating, to creams and ointments to relieve itching and soothe rashes.</p>



<p>Echinacea (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>)</p> 	<p>Echinacea seeds need at least 28 days to germinate and must be kept at least 18 degrees Celsius.</p> <p>Plant in a mix of loam and bark.</p> <p>They will happily grow in large pots or troughs, or directly in the garden.</p>	<p>Echinacea tends not to be used in cooking.</p>	<p>Echinacea is well known for boosting the immune system, but it's also a really good wound healer and make an anti-inflammatory wound healing ointment.</p>
<p>Hyssop (<i>Hyssopus officinalis</i>)</p> 	<p>Grow from seed in the spring (in the warm) and plant out when large enough.</p> <p>Plant 30cm apart.</p> <p>Hyssop is less fussy with soil type.</p>	<p>Flowers can be added to salads, and the leaves can be added to flavour game dishes.</p>	<p>Hyssop is a traditional remedy for coughs in children, a strong decoction of the herb can be turned into a cough syrup.</p>
<p>Lemon balm (<i>Melissa officinalis</i>)</p> 	<p>Lemon balm can be grown from seed in spring (do not over water), and germination takes 10 – 14 days.</p> <p>Once large enough plant out approximately 30cm apart.</p>	<p>Fresh leaves can be added to salads or desserts (in a similar way to mint). You can also add it to vinegar to make a lovely salad dressing.</p>	<p>Lemon balm makes a relaxing tea before bed or after a stressful day.</p>

<p>Peppermint (<i>Mentha piperita</i>)</p> 	<p>Sow seeds in a warm place in spring, and plant out once large enough. Mints are not fussy with soil type and can handle more shade and more water than other plants.</p>	<p>Peppermint can be used as you would use common mint in desserts.</p> <p>It also makes a lovely tea.</p>	<p>Peppermint can aid digestion and relieve trapped wind and bloating. It can also be used to bring down fevers and externally it can soothe insect bites and stings.</p>
<p>Rosemary (<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>)</p> 	<p>Rosemary seeds require much more heat to germinate, so an airing cupboard is a good idea.</p> <p>Once large enough plant 60cm apart.</p>	<p>Rosemary can be added to lots of different dishes and is a common culinary herb.</p>	<p>Rosemary traditionally was used to improve memory. The scent of rosemary has been shown to aid memory in exams.</p> <p>As a tea rosemary can settle an upset stomach. As an infused oil rosemary can be rubbed on the temples for headache relief.</p>
<p>Feverfew (<i>Tanacetum parthenium</i>)</p> 	<p>Germination takes up to 2 weeks, plant in a seed tray in Spring and plant out when large enough.</p> <p>Feverfew likes the sun and a well-drained soil.</p>	<p>Feverfew is very bitter so tends not to be used culinary.</p>	<p>Feverfew as its name suggests was traditionally used to reduce fevers.</p> <p>Today it is most well-known for reducing migraines. It can be taken as a preventative tea.</p>

## **Cautions**

Herbs can be very beneficial when used as a medicine and a food but they can interact with medications. If you are taking any medication you can still use herbs in cooking but should not take them medicinally without consulting a medical herbalist.

Herbs should not be used in pregnancy without first consulting a medical herbalist.

## **More information**

This is just a brief look at what these fantastic herbs can do, most herbs have at least 20 uses, and you can find out more and how to make the remedies mentioned above from my [YouTube](#) videos.

You can also learn more from my [distance learning courses](#).

## **References**

Jekka's Complete Herb Book by Jekka McVicar

Vegetable, Fruit and Herb growing in small spaces by John Harrison

The kitchen herb garden: A seasonal guide to growing, cooking and using culinary herbs by Maureen Little

Growing herbs indoors and outdoors: With cooking recipes using fresh herbs by John Denny

RHS Grow your own: Crops in Pots: with 30 step by step projects using vegetables, fruits and herbs by Kay Maguire

## **Suppliers**

[Poyntzfield herbs](#)

[Herbal Haven](#)

[Jekka's Herb Farm](#)

[Herb Farm](#)

[National Herb Centre](#)

[The Green Seed company](#)