

## Growing Herbs indoors

Fresh herbs are among the most fascinating and useful of all plant varieties. Not only can they be used in cooking -a simple addition of chopped chives sprinkled over an omelet or soup, or a very elaborate Pesto sauce fashioned from fresh grown basil, make it difficult not to get passionate about herbs. But Herbs are so much more than that! They are beautiful to look at; offer great scents in the home, fresh or dried; can be used for medicinal and healing purposes; or fashioned into beautiful herbal gifts; and they're so much fun to grow!

These rewards don't have to be limited to a summer garden (which we all know is entirely too short-lived in Flagstaff!). Herbs are incredibly easy to grow indoors, and even just a few potted herbs can supply you with wonderful seasonings and herbal gifts through the rest of the year.

Growing herbs indoors not only extends your growing season, allowing you to harvest fresh herbs all year, but some herbs actually do better in containers than planted in the ground. It is easier to adjust the soil to suit each plant as well as for maintenance and watering. Many herbs can become aggressive and messy looking in the garden, but confined in a container are much more attractive. Once the chance of frost is over you can move your containers outside onto a patio or deck.

### Step 1: Choose your herbs

When choosing which herbs to grow indoors, first think of which varieties you will most likely utilize. It doesn't make much sense to put the time and energy into growing an herb that you won't use in cooking, or making into a homemade gift!

Next, decide how much effort you want to put into growing your herbs, and how much time you can realistically devote to the project.

Some of the most Easy to Grow Varieties (and less time consuming) include:

**Chives**  
**Parsley**

**Lemongrass**  
**Nasturtium**

**Mint**

If you have a little more time and energy to devote to growing your herbs, consider some of these more difficult herbs to grow:

**Oregano**  
**Dill**

**Rosemary**

**Thyme**

If you decide you are up for a bigger challenge, here are some of the Hardest to Grow herbs:

**Basil**

**Cilantro**

**Sage**

## **Step 2: Choose the container & potting mix**

Choose a container that will allow you to give your plant as much sun as possible, such as in a windowsill or bright, sunny room. Remember, you have the option of many small pots for each herb, or one or a couple of large pots with groupings of herbs. (If you choose to do a grouping, choose plants with similar light and water requirements, and also consider the growth of each herb. You don't want your catnip to choke out your prized basil, as it did to me!

Also, choose a container that allows for proper drainage. If you find a container without drainage holes, use a masonry bit and drill a hole in the bottom.

Potted herbs do equally well in a compost material combined with peat moss; vermiculite; or perlite. Any organic Potting Soil will also work well.

## **Step 3: Place the plant in the appropriate area**

Your herbs are going to need a lot of light! If you have a nice window with Southern Exposure that receives at least 6-8 hours of natural light, place your herbs there. If not, you will need to provide at least 14-16 hours of artificial light. (We have a variety of grow lamps at the nursery for you to choose from!)

Indoor herbs will need the daytime temperature to remain around 70-75 degrees, and nighttime temperatures of about 55-60 degrees.

You will also need to ensure that the plants have proper spacing to allow air circulation. This is important to maintain temperature, humidity, health & development.


## **Step 4: Maintaining the plant**

Watering, like for any plant, is the most important and most complicated aspect to maintaining your indoor herbs. As a general rule, water your herbs when the soil is dry to the touch, about as deep as your fingertip. Each of the following aspects will impact water needs:

- variety of plant
- Location (full sun, under a heating source etc)
- Time of year

Keep a close eye on your indoor herbs. Leaves which turn Yellow or dark, or slow growth are signs of inconsistent watering. (These signs are the same for over and under-watering.)

Using a good compost potting soil when planting will add flavor to your herbs. To keep them healthy and flavorful, though, your indoor grown herbs will require



regular fertilizing. Use a mild fertilizer such as VF-11 or Fish Emulsion once every two weeks according to the directions on the label. Be very careful when diluting as herbs are easy to over-fertilize and burn, especially in small pots.

**Pests** may become a problem with an indoor herb garden. The high temperatures the herbs require will foster pest reproduction. Maintaining an overall healthy plant will help keep bugs away. When pests do arrive, organic pesticides are safe and effective – they won't harm your pets or children, and will ensure the herbs remain edible. We recommend Neem Oil or Safer Soap for most pests. Some insects can be safely washed off as well, if you prefer not to use any products. However, the most common indoor pest, the fungus gnat, will lay its eggs in the soil of the plant, and the larvae will eat the roots. These pests require an insecticide to get rid of them – make sure you spray the leaves and the soil!