

Easy-to-Grow Herbs for the Landscape

The value of herbs has been known for centuries. They have been used as flavorings in foods and as medicines for ailments. In addition, herbs are used as ornamental plants in the landscape.

Herb gardens add interest to any landscape, with a wide array of characteristics such as form, aroma, and unusual foliage. Herbs are used as borders, accent plants, and hedges. Further selection is based on whether the growing site is sunny or shady, wet or dry.

Starting an Herb Garden

Most garden centers offer a broad selection of herbs for immediate planting in the landscape. Select healthy, vigorously growing plants. The roots should be white to greenish-white. Be sure not to plant the herb any deeper than it was growing in the container. Planting too deep may cause the roots to rot.

Choosing a Planting Site

Most herbs thrive best in well-drained soil, with a soil pH of 6.0 to 6.8. The growing area should be tilled to a depth of 8 to 12 inches. Although herbs are somewhat drought-tolerant, adequate soil moisture is required for vigorous growth. Annual herbs require higher available soil moisture than perennial herbs.

Increase the water-holding capacity of sandy soils by adding a 2-inch layer of organic matter such as compost, sphagnum peat moss, or pine bark. Till the organic matter thoroughly into the soil. Amend heavy clay soils with compost or pine bark; otherwise, beds should be constructed to provide internal drainage.

Fertilizing

A proper nutritional balance is important for proper growth. Get a soil test before fertilizing. Overfertilization causes succulent, or weak, growth. Succulent growth dilutes the concentration of essential oils, thus limiting the flavor and aroma of the herbs. On the other hand, inadequate fertilization will limit growth, resulting in stunted and weak plants.

Base your fertilizer on the soil test recommendations. If you did not do a soil test, apply a complete, slow-release fertilizer with a 1-2-2 or 1-2-1 ratio of N, P, and K in the spring and again in mid- to late summer.

Mulching

Mulch with pine bark, straw, or wood chips, being careful not to pile the mulch around the stem base.

Pruning

Tender herbs should be pruned to remove dead tissue in early spring before growth begins. Herbs valued for their young foliage should be pruned regularly during the growing season to encourage fresh, young growth.

Harvesting

For foliage with the maximum amount of oil, harvest in the early morning, after the dew has dried. If this is not convenient, harvesting may be done anytime. To allow adequate time for regrowth of perennial herbs, do not harvest rigorously after late summer.

Mississippi Medallion Herb Selections

As a tool for promoting Mississippi-grown plants, the Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA) established the Mississippi Medallion Program in 1996. The



Figure 1. 'Purple Ruffles' basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) was the first Mississippi Medallion award-winning herb.

purpose of this program is to identify plants that perform exceptionally well throughout the state and to promote the proper use of these plants in Mississippi landscapes.

Selections are evaluated at research sites before being brought before a selection committee. This promotional program is a joint effort of the MNLA, Mississippi State University Extension Service, Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, and Mississippi Plant Selections Committee.

In 2004, 'Purple Ruffles' basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) was chosen as the first Mississippi Medallion award-winning herb (Figure 1). Deep purple leaves are intensely fragrant and are highly attractive in both herb gardens and flower beds. This annual will reach 24 inches in both height and width in full sun. Plants should be spaced at least 24 inches apart to ensure ample room in the bed. Basil should be fertilized with light applications of 5-10-5 fertilizer every 4 to 6 weeks or after harvesting leaves. Suggestions for use include color in salads, herbal vinegars, and pesto sauce.

The Mississippi Medallion Selections Committee chose cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus*) in 2008 (Figure 2). A full-sun perennial, cardoon thrives in cool-season landscapes and is used similarly to kale, cabbage, or mustard. Cardoon reaches 2 to 3 feet tall and wide. It can reach 4 to 6 feet if allowed to reach bloom in early summer. Plants should be spaced 18 to 24 inches apart for the cool-season landscape. Cardoon is edible, but blooms are also well-suited for cut-flower use. Plants should be spaced 42 inches apart if grown for blooms.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) was chosen as the Mississippi Medallion award-winning herb for 2016 (Figure 3). A woody herb suited for full sun, rosemary cultivars may be either upright or prostrate. In general, upright rosemary measures 24 to 36 inches in height. Prostrate, or creeping, rosemary measures 1 to 2 feet in height and 2 to 3 feet in width. Narrow, gray-green leaves bring fragrance and texture to the landscape. Small flowers appear in various shades of white to deep blue. Rosemary requires well-drained soil but is drought-tolerant after establishment.



Figure 2. Cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus*) was the 2008 Mississippi Medallion award-winning herb. Herbs can be used in the landscape as ornamental plants. (Photo by Gary Bachman)



Figure 3. Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) was the Mississippi Medallion award-winning herb in 2016.

Table 1. List of easy-to-grow herbs.

Herb	Height (inches)	Description	Culture
Anise (<i>Pimpinella anisum</i>)	20–24	Serrated leaves; small, white flowers. Low, spreading, slow-growing annual.	Likes moderately rich soil and full sun. Space 6–8 inches in rows 12–14 inches apart.
Basil (<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>)	20–24	Leafy, light-green foliage; white or lavender flowers. Fast-growing annual.	Start seeds indoors in early April or seed in early spring. Space 12 inches. Prefers protected, sunny location.
Borage (<i>Borago officinalis</i>)	24–36	Coarse, rough, hairy leaves. Produces light-blue flowers in drooping clusters. Cool-season annual.	Seed directly in early spring. Space 12 inches. May germinate slowly.
Caraway (<i>Carum carvi</i>)	10–24	Carrot-like leaf with small, creamy-white flowers. Biennial.	Seed directly in spring; locate in full sun. Space 6 inches.
Chervil (<i>Anthriscus cerefolium</i>)	10–28	Similar to parsley; light-green, lacy leaves. Flowers are small white clusters. Annual.	Sow seeds in a moist, partially shaded location. Space 6 inches.
Chives (<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>)	12–18	Dark-green clumps of tubular, grasslike leaves, forming a fluffy, lavender pom-pom flower in mid- to late spring. Tough, easy perennial.	Thrives in rich, well-drained soil. Easily propagated from division. Divide every 3 years.
Cilantro, Coriander (<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>)	12–14	Large, coarse plant with white flowers. Cool-season annual.	Sow seeds in full-sun area; thin to 10 inches.
Dill (<i>Anethum graveolens</i>)	24–36	Tall plant with feathery green leaves. Open, umbrella-shaped flower heads. Cool-season annual.	Seed directly; thin to 12 inches. If seeds mature and fall, they may come up again next year.
Fennel (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>)	36	Fine, feathery leaves with licorice flavor. Perennial.	Sow in early spring; thin to 12 inches.
Lavender (<i>Lavandula</i> spp.)	12–36	Shrubby plant with silver-gray foliage and lavender flowers during midsummer. Very fragrant aroma from leaves and flowers. Perennial.	Prefers slightly alkaline, well-drained soil.
Lemon Balm (<i>Melissa officinalis</i>)	24	Spreading plant with yellowish-green, heart-shaped leaves that give off a lemony aroma when bruised. Spikes of small, white, yellow, or pinkish flowers bloom from summer until fall. Perennial.	Easily propagated from root cuttings in spring or fall; requires sandy, moist soil. Pinch tops to maintain a full, compact plant. Prolific re-seeder.
Mexican Mint Marigold (<i>Tagetes lucida</i>)	24–36	Good substitute for French tarragon in southern gardens. Tough perennial with light-green leaves and yellow flowers in late summer.	Grow in full sun. Easily propagated by seed or cuttings.
Mint (<i>Mentha</i> spp.)	12–24	Spreading, bushy perennial with highly fragrant leaves; oval, light-green leaves. Purple or white flowers are borne in clusters on long spikes.	Easily propagated by division. Can be a nuisance unless spreading roots and stems are confined.
Oregano (<i>Origanum vulgare</i>)	24	Very aromatic perennial with mainly pink flowers.	Grow in full sun. Easily propagated by division or cuttings.
Parsley (<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>)	10–24	Several varieties, including curled, Italian, or French parsley, are available. Even though parsley is a biennial, treat it as an annual. It produces a rather compact plant, forming long, bright-green leaves. Curled parsley makes an excellent seasonal border.	Sow seeds each spring; slow to germinate. Favors well-drained soil.
Sage (<i>Salvia officinalis</i>)	18–24	Coarse, aromatic, grayish-green leaves with purple to white flowers. Perennial.	Grow in well-drained soil in a sunny location. Propagate by cuttings.
Savory, Summer (<i>Satureja hortensis</i>)	18	Small, gray-green leaves with purple and white flowers.	Plant this tender annual after danger of frost. Space 6–9 inches.
Sweet Marjoram (<i>Origanum majorana</i>)	12	Fine-textured plant with white flowers. Perennial.	Grow in full sun. Space 8–10 inches. Can be propagated by division or cuttings.
Thyme, Lemon (<i>Thymus × citriodorus</i>)	6	Trailing growth habit; golden-green, highly fragrant leaves. Excellent for rock gardens.	Sow seeds and thin; easily propagated by cuttings.

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Revised by **Christine E. Coker**, PhD, Extension/Research Professor, Coastal Research and Extension Center, from an earlier edition by Lelia Kelly, PhD, David Tatum, PhD, and Norman Winter, former Extension horticulturists.



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