

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET

Have gardening questions? Contact the **Master Gardener Help Line.**

At *Mass Hort, Wellesley*: mghelpline@masshort.org, 617-933-4929

At *Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston*: hortline@towerhillbg.org, 608-869-6111 x104

Please visit our website for Help Line hours: <http://massmastergardeners.org/what-i-do/>



SAVORY HERBS – YEAR ROUND!

Whether grown from seeds, cuttings or purchased as seedlings, many homegrown herbs can be available for use year round. The most critical element of successful herb gardening is adequate sunlight. If you can give your herbs at least six hours a day of sunlight, you can have an herb garden—indoors or out.

Growing conditions

Many of our favorite herbs are native to the Mediterranean region and thrive in standard and even poor garden soil, with a minimal amount of fertilizer. After a full day of sunlight, the second most important herb requirement is good drainage -- few herbs can tolerate wet feet. Many herbs (basil, chervil and dill) can be started from seed, others (oregano, marjoram and thyme) will need a head start as seedlings started indoors or purchased from a nursery. Outdoor winter survival for many herbs is unreliable in New England. Good drainage and a cold frame or tenting of plastic can aid survival, particularly of woody herbs such as lavender and rosemary.

Because of their drought tolerance, herbs make great container plants. They can summer outdoors and, with a little extra care, can often be wintered over. Plant herbs in individual pots and increase the size of the pot only when the plant becomes too large for its home. A grouping of herbs within a large pot makes gardening even easier.

Always start with clean containers with good drainage and a soil free mix. Water only when dry to an inch below the surface -- check with your finger. Do not fertilize plants unless they have been growing in the same container for more than six months. Few insects bother herbs. If you see a caterpillar eating your dill, don't kill it. It will become a beautiful swallowtail butterfly!

Harvesting and storage

Harvest your herbs in the morning, handling carefully to avoid bruising of the leaves. You can cut back up to one-half the plant but unless you are planning on drying or freezing them, take only the herbs you will use within a day or two. Wash them only when you are ready to use them. If you are storing them for later use, wash and pat dry, then refrigerate in a plastic bag with holes.

Do not wash herbs you plan to dry. Dried herbs have concentrated flavor and generally far less is needed in a recipe. It is important to store dried herbs in airtight containers -- zip lock bags or containers with a closeable top. They must be stored out of light and away from a heat source; however, even dried herbs have a limited shelf life -- they will lose their flavor after a year or less. Herbs may also be frozen either whole or chopped. Place them in a freezer. They may even be pureed and placed in ice cube trays with water, oil or butter. Just pop them out to use!

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics.

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