

Herbs

Culture

Provide full sun and well-drained soil. Place indoor herbs in locations where they will receive at least five hours of sunlight or 12 hours of artificial light.

Harvest

Harvest leaves just before the plant produces blooms. Basil, cilantro, parsley, sage and savory leaves are best picked when they're young because young leaves have more flavor. Older leaves develop a bitter taste. Pick the leaves in the morning before the sun becomes too hot. You can cut off about 1/3 of the foliage; the plant will put out new growth. Seeds are ready to gather when they take on a greenish-brown color. Cut off seed heads on a hot, dry day. Dry for two weeks on a tray or in a brown paper bag, then store in an airtight container.

Drying

Air drying: Hang bunches upside down in a dark, well-ventilated area or spread them on a screen and cover them with cheesecloth.

Oven drying: Spread a single layer on a cookie sheet and bake at 120 degrees until dry and crispy.

Microwave drying: Place a few sprigs between paper towels and microwave at lowest setting for 30 second intervals until the herbs are dry and crumble. Timing will vary according to the herb being dried.

Storage

Store in airtight containers away from heat and light. Glass is preferable because plastic absorbs essential oils. No matter how airtight the container, dried herbs begin to lose flavor in about a year.

Choosing and Using

Rosemary. Use fresh or frozen to flavor salads, potatoes, herb butter, lamb, chicken. A decorative addition to wreaths and garlands.

Nasturtium. Mild, peppery flavor, similar to horseradish. Use the flowers as a garnish in salads or roll leaves around a stuffing.

Apple Mint. Use fresh as a garnish for beverages or desserts. Use dried to concoct an herb tea.

Basil. Use fresh or dried to flavor sauces, vegetables, salads.

Catnip. Most commonly used to make toys filled with dried, crumbled leaves for cats. Leaves release a scent that usually makes a cat playful. Herb tea made with catnip alone or in combination with other herbs acts as a mild sedative and relieves headaches.



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