

SELECTING CULINARY HERBS FOR TENNESSEE GARDENS

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Herbs have long been a part of gardens and human culture around the world. From food to health, these plants have benefited humans in a myriad of ways. While herbs have a long history, they are still used and enjoyed by both new and experienced gardeners and plant people alike. From enabling gardening to occur in small spaces to the benefits of a wide range of culinary attributes, herb gardening really does have something for everyone. Success with herb gardening is largely a matter of proper selection of herbs to fit your location and needs with good management during and after planting. This selection publication and the [Growing Culinary Herbs in Tennessee Gardens](#) publication will get you well on your way to success with a range of culinary herbs.



I. An Introduction to Herbs

A. How We Define Herbs

Our discussions about garden herbs are based on horticultural and culinary use rather than botany. The botanical definition of herb refers to plants that are herbaceous, meaning they don't have woody stems. This discussion will be much narrower and will focus on plants whose leaves or stems are used for flavoring. Spices are commonly classified as plants with seeds, fruit, bark, or roots that are used for flavor. While many spices are tropical (vanilla, black pepper) and not commonly grown in the mid-south, there are some common herbs that can also be spices. This publication will cover both herbs and spices that can be grown in our climate. Interestingly, the pronunciation may be more difficult to settle than the definition when it comes to herbs. British English speakers often pronounce the "h," but most American English speakers go with a silent h for a spoken "erb." Either can be correct, though.

Another important aspect of understanding herbs is that many have cultural significance and have been historically and even currently used for medicinal applications. Those medicinal uses are beyond the scope of this publication because of the risk of misuse or misidentification. Likewise, discerning which wild, foraged, or even uncommon, cultivated plants are edible and in what form or quantity the plant is safe is a complex topic that is also beyond this publication's scope. While our Extension personnel and volunteers respect historical, cultural, and medicinal uses of herbs, our consumer horticulture and gardening resources focus on horticultural practices for common culinary herbs grown and used by novice and experienced gardeners alike.

B. Plant Compounds that Provide Distinctive Herb Flavors and Scents

Horticulture is often focused on ensuring plants receive proper light, water, and nutrients to produce carbohydrates that provide energy and structural building blocks essential for growth of leaves, stems, flowers, and fruits. However, plants also produce a truly impressive array of other compounds broadly referred to as secondary metabolites. Some of them are pigments or volatiles (such as fragrances) attractive to pollinators or compounds that offer protection from environmental stresses or insect feeding. These secondary compounds are an active area of research with many roles still to be discovered.

When it comes to herbs, these secondary compounds provide the flavors and aromas that provide the culinary value. Many of these compounds can also be extracted from the herb for use in many food, cleaning, health, and other products. For the

gardener, understanding a little about these secondary compounds, as well as how and why they are produced can be an asset in getting the best quality from the herb garden.

Environmental factors, such as water, light, and nutrient stress can increase the concentration of some of these compounds in herbs. This could be an asset, or it could lead to overly strong flavor profiles. Some of these factors are in the control of the gardener. For instance, slight water deficits can increase some of the flavor compounds in herbs. However, there are limits to our ability to control temperature and rainfall in a way that could enhance herb aroma or quality in outdoor growing areas. Additionally, genetic factors can interact with climate conditions to influence the overall quality and use of your herbs. Our discussions here focus on growing practices to support plant health and productivity as the primary goal. Keep in mind the many complex relationships between the environment and plant growth means yearly or seasonal conditions, as well as management methods can impact the quality of the culinary herbs grown in your garden.

II. Common Culinary Herbs by Family

With that introduction to herbs and genetic and climatic influences, the remainder of this publication focuses on the herbs themselves. Each of the common herbs is briefly profiled along with key growing and use information. To enable gardeners to understand the overall family relationship of these herbs, the discussion is organized by family. This list is based on herbs that fall under GRAS (generally recognized as safe) for common culinary use. Some of the other uses, such as dyes, potpourri, and pollinator support in landscape plantings, may be mentioned but are not the focus of this publication. Common landscape plants that may be classified as herbs are discussed in other Extension publications.



A. Culinary Herbs in the Mint Family-Lamiaceae

Basil (*Ocimum* species)-Most are annual

Basil is an aromatic and flavorful member of the mint family native to tropical regions of Africa and Asia. Sweet basil (*O. basilicum*) is likely the most widely used culinary herb worldwide. It is a tender annual in Tennessee, so direct sowing of seed or transplanting should be done one to two weeks after the last frost date. While species and cultivars can differ, plants are typically 12-18 inches tall with foliage color from green to purple. Leaf size also varies from large lettuce-like leaves to very small leaves. Pruning (or pinching to harvest) throughout the season encourages new growth, as well as bushier growth as secondary shoots elongate after primary growing points are removed. When basil blooms and begins to set seed, the flavor can be impacted. So, cultivar selection for slow flower formation as well as frequent harvests are used to produce slower flowering plants. Basil is often grown from seed but there are newer cultivars that are vegetatively produced. Breeding for downy mildew resistance is a current objective.

There are many basil species and cultivars available. Genovese basil, traditionally used in pesto dishes, is one of the most common. It can also be a great place to begin herb growing because of the many cultivars available and the options for disease resistance as well as common cooking uses. Fans of Indonesian or Indian cuisine should consider lemon basil for curry and stir-fries. Thai or Holy basil is considered “hot” because of its peppery flavor.

All types of basil can be used in fresh salads, sandwiches, and wraps for a burst of flavor. Basil is also popular as a microgreen for interest and flavor in a range of dishes. Preserving in ice cubes is an efficient way to cook with basil (and/or pesto), although texture is lost with freezing. Basil can also be blended with olive oil in ice cube trays for later use. After freezing, store all cubes in an air-tight container. Drying basil is simple but results in more flavor loss than freezing. When basil is used in cooking, it is best to add at the end to preserve both color and flavor.

Mint (*Mentha* species)-Perennial and hardy to zone 5

This Mediterranean native is considered one of the easiest herbs to grow because of its vigor and wide tolerance to soil, water, and light conditions. Mints are adaptable, but generally shallow rooted and prefer fertile and moist soil with a pH slightly below 7.0. Many regard mints as invasive because of their rapid growth, but steps can be taken to contain growth by using containers both above and in the ground. Mints propagate well from cuttings, and most are not able and/or desirable to produce from seeds.

The many species of *Mentha* are continually hybridizing, which produces confusion for botanists but wide interest for gardeners. Peppermint and spearmint are the most common commercially and noncommercially, but other options include pineapple, apple, chocolate, banana, orange (or Bergamot), lavender, ginger, Corsican, Pennyroyal and more.

The long days of northern areas that induce flowering are actually best for oil yield. Long stems and narrow leaves are a sign that it is time to prune to maintain vigor. Mint also responds to environmental conditions, meaning that growth and flavor or aroma compounds can vary depending on site and season.

There are a range of uses for the many mints. Tea is one of the most common uses with peppermint producing a stronger tea and spearmint having a sweeter flavor. Dried orange mint tea can produce a flavor similar Earl Grey but is caffeine free. Other favorite uses are jams/jellies, sauces, rubs, or marinades for lamb dishes. Dried mint leaves are used for aromas in potpourri as well as food flavoring. The role of mint in classic drinks such as mojitos and mint juleps cannot be forgotten.

Marjoram, sweet (*Origanum majorana*)-Generally an annual in TN (most are hardy to zone 9)

This common culinary herb was largely unknown in America until after World War II when soldiers returned from Italy. Sweet marjoram is regarded as a tender perennial (zone 9), which essentially means annual in most Tennessee areas. There are some hybrids which can be hardy to zone 7, so research specifics when selecting cultivars. Marjoram prefers full sun with moist to dry but well-drained soils, and it can tolerate drier sites once well established. Good drainage is essential for survival and production of this slow-growing, spreading plant which reaches only 12-24 inches in height. The slow growing habit also makes sweet marjoram a good option for containers, which can be moved inside to overwinter. Leaves are pale green and can become leggy if grown in shade. When harvesting, allow ample time between cuttings for plant to recover to remain viable and only harvest about a third of the plant. Can be propagated by seeds or cuttings.

Harvest prior to flowering to prevent bitterness. Marjoram is a milder flavor and is one of the herbs used in Herbes de Provence.

Wild marjoram, oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)-Perennial, hardy to zone 6

This aromatic herb is a tender perennial native to the Mediterranean region known as both wild marjoram and oregano. The plant has oval leaves appearing in pairs on reddish stems with dense, rounded clusters of small, pink flowers growing on the ends of stems. As with herbs from this region, it requires a well-drained soil and prefers full sun. It propagates well by cuttings and can be grown in-ground or containers. There are several subspecies, some of which are not as useful in culinary terms, so use caution when selecting. To keep the plant robust, keep pruned low, continually removing flower buds. Be sure to harvest shoots prior to flowers blooming to reduce bitter taste of the plant.

Oregano is likely best known for its use in tomato dishes, such as pizza and pasta. The flavor often has piney undertones and is bolder than sweet marjoram. Take care when cooking with oregano, as its bold flavor can overtake some dishes. It can be added at any time during cooking as the flavor will not be lost. The pungency is more noticeable fresh versus dry. It pairs nicely with other mints as well as garlic and olive oil. In addition to cooking, oregano can be infused in vinegars and oils, made into a compound butter or pesto. When drying oregano, be sure to either dry in a dehydrator or in a well-ventilated area. Never dry in the full sun or dry in the oven to prevent flavor loss.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)-Tender Perennial with variable hardiness (zone 7 or 8)

This evergreen perennial is native to the Mediterranean and Asia. It is well known for its needle-like leaves that have a bluish tint as well as its blue (sometimes purple, pink, or white) flowers. The aroma of rosemary is distinctive and has a range of fragrance uses in addition to culinary. It is also considered an ornamental landscape plant with good pollinator support. Some cultivars reach a few feet tall and wide. There are cultivars with a range of sizes and growth habits. Good drainage and gravel mulches rather than thick organic mulches can be used to reduce disease and enhance survival. Prune in spring or early summer to provide for more sunlight interception and production of new foliage. Rosemary can be grown well in containers, but they should be long-term containers and not frequently transplanted. Be careful not to overwater, so consider clay pots that drain well. Typically propagated by cuttings because of difficulty and variability from seed.



For peak flavor, harvest just before bloom when oils are highest. Rosemary is easy to dry but must be stored well to retain flavor. Rosemary provides hints of evergreen, citrus, lavender, pine, pepper, mint, and sage flavors, along with its distinctive woody scent. The longer rosemary is cooked, the more potent its flavor becomes. Used in a vast array of meats, desserts, cordials, breads, butters, jams, cheeses, oils, vinegars, and vegetables.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) Perennial

There are more than 900 species of *Salvia* with a wide range of ornamental and culinary uses. The most common culinary species are *S. officinalis*. These are perennial plants with woolly, grayish leaves and spikes of purple/blue flowers appearing in mid-summer native to the Mediterranean. Prefers full sun and well-drained soil and can perform well under low moisture but does not tolerate wet soils or poor drainage. Pruning is necessary to prevent legginess and woodiness and to maintain vigor. It is recommended to allow plants to establish themselves with light, pinching to support branching real harvests beginning the second year. Sage is not known as a long-lived perennial, so its production may be limited to three or so years. Cultivars with lower flowering are preferred to increase harvest potential. Seed propagation is uncertain, so most named cultivars are propagated through cuttings.



From a culinary standpoint, tender new sage leaves are more flavorful than older leaves on woody stems. The flavor is musky, providing an earthy addition known as the focal point in holiday stuffing/dressing. Sage is traditionally used to flavor meat dishes such as sausage. In addition to flavor, it can help the body to digest fatty meats. Sage is also added to breads, compound butters, salad oils, vinegars, vegetables, and cheese.

Summer and winter savory (*Satureja hortensis*, *Satureja montana*), Annual/Perennial

Satureja is a genus of plants that are small shrubs in their native regions, preferring sunny, dry sites. Summer savory (*S. hortensis*) is an annual, low-growing herb related to thyme and rosemary, small white, pink, or lilac flowers in mid-summer. It transplants easily to the garden after the first frost. Prefers full sun with a well-drained soil that is rich with good access to moisture and can grow well in higher pH sites. To maximize flavor profile, begin harvesting after plants reaches 5-6 inches in height to encourage new branches and compact growth. As with most herbs, harvest prior to bloom when flavor is at its sweetest. Also note, essential oil is at its highest in the afternoon. Because it is an annual, collect seeds once leaves begin to die back in late summer. The whole plant can be harvested as the first frost nears. Often propagated from seeds and can be difficult to find in garden centers.

Summer savory has a peppery flavor with notes of marjoram, mint, and thyme that is used in marinades and dry rubs for grilled meats. It is often combined with other aromatic herbs in vinegars, soups, stews, oils, and vegetables Savory is one of the main ingredients in herbes de Provence and can replace thyme in many recipes.

Winter savory (*S. montana*) is a hardy, herbaceous perennial with a shorter plant habit. It grows well in lighter soils and can handle a little shade. Winter savory can grow quickly to be able to be harvested a few months into the first growing season. While perennial, these plants produce lower levels of new growth as they age, so may need frequently replaced.

Winter savory has a spicier and more peppery than summer savory. It can be used with beans during cooking as a salt substitute. Dried leaves are used in potpourri with fresh or dried leaves used to infuse vinegar, compound butters or steeped for tea.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris* and hybrids)-Perennial, hardy to zone 6

Thymus is another genus with hundreds of species that can hybridize readily. Garden thyme (*T. vulgaris*) is the most commonly used. It is thought to be native to the Mediterranean region and southern Italy. Thyme is a drought-friendly, low-growing hardy perennial with small, fragrant leaves on thin, woody stems amid tiny purplish/pink flowers. Prefers full sun and sites with well-drained soil. Culinary varieties are evergreen and grow well in both containers and in-ground. New leaves emerge in early spring. Divide every three to four years to maintain vigor and flavor. When harvesting, leave the woody stems, as there is no flavor profile in the stem. Propagate from stem cuttings as seeds will not always come true.

Common thyme, also known as English thyme, is most often used in culinary dishes to provide a gentle earthy, minty, somewhat lemony flavor to most any dish (especially eggs, tomatoes, meats, soups, beans, and potatoes). Dries and freezes well and dried thyme retains enough flavor to be suitable to substitute for fresh. As an added note, recipes calling for a “sprig,” means the stem is added (the leaves fall off during cooking-remove stem before serving) while a recipe calling for “fresh thyme” requires removing the leaves from stem.

Lemon thyme, which is a hybrid with garden thyme, adds a subtle essence of lemon flavor and aroma, without the bitterness of common thyme. It can be substituted for common thyme in recipes. Lemon thyme often looks nearly identical to common thyme but has different aromatic compounds.

B. Other Herbs with Limited Culinary Uses in the Mint Family- Lamiaceae

Agastache/Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*)-Perennial

Agastache is a native, aromatic herbaceous perennial that is becoming widely available in trade with many new cultivars. It performs well in sunny sites with good drainage and a pH near 7.0. Common names include anise hyssop, mint, and/or hummingbird flower/mint. This herb has grey/green foliage with long flower spikes that bloom from top to bottom throughout the season in lavender to blue shades as well as rose, white and peach to pinks tones. Anise hyssop is an excellent pollinator plant. While it is common for Agastache to be suggested as a replacement for tarragon, it does not have a reported GRAS (generally recognized as safe), so we won't detail culinary uses.

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* and hybrids)-Perennial (zone 6 to 9)

Native to the Mediterranean region, common lavender (*L. angustifolia*) is an evergreen, perennial shrub that requires well-drained soil and full sun. Also known as English Lavender or true lavender, this plant is the source of true lavender essential oil used in a variety of products. 'Munsted' is one of the most common cultivars. It blooms in summer with aromatic flowers of blue/lavender most commonly with leaves noted for their silvery, grey-green color. When sited well, it is a nice border plant but dislikes heavy, clay soils and may be best suited to container growing in areas without excellent drainage. It is common in higher humidity areas or those with more challenging soil conditions to grow *L. x intermedia* with the cultivars 'Grosso' and 'Phenomenal' being well-known hybrid cultivars. Removing the spent flower spikes after flowering and pruning yearly lengthens productivity of the plant. Most cultivars are propagated by cuttings.

The flowers can be dried and used in potpourris, sachets, pillows, and various crafts as well as dried in flower arrangements. Lavender oil has a GRAS at low levels but is generally used more in soaps, oils, and aromatherapy than in culinary uses. In small amounts, it can be used in teas, as well as a sweet addition to baked goods, in infusions or in meat grilling.

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*)-Perennial and hardy to zone 5

This perennial member of the mint family is native to Europe and Northern Africa. It yields a distinctive lemony antiseptic scent when leaves are crushed. In the garden, lemon balm is an excellent pollinator plant (*Melissa* comes from the Greek word for bee) and prefers full sun and well-drained soil but tolerates both drought and partial shade. This prolific plant can reach heights of three feet and is sometimes considered aggressive due to its growth and potential to reseed easily. Containers, as well as pruning throughout the season, can be a means of containing growth, producing a more compact plant, and providing a wider supply of fresh lemon balm. Produced from seeds or cuttings.

Lemon balm dries easily and can maintain freshness for up to a year if stored in an air-tight container. Substitute for mint or lemon peel in recipes. Tea can be made by bruising ¼ cup fresh leaves before steeping in boiling water for 5-10 minutes. Keep covered to prevent evaporation of the essential oils.

C. Culinary Herbs in the Parsley Family- Apiaceae

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)-Annual

Dill is a member of the celery family with edible leaves, seeds, and flowers. The term "dillweed" refers to the foliage as an herb while dill generally refers to use of the seeds. It prefers soil that is well drained, not compacted, with a full-sun site. The plant is upright and multi-branched with flowers that are umbels up to three inches across with heights ranging from 18-40 inches. When the flowers produce seed, the plant stops producing foliage, so sequential seeding every 2-4 weeks is recommended. Dill does not transplant well due to a deep taproot, so is often best directed seeded. Prefers full sun and loose soil, as compacted soils pose an issue for dill's large taproot. Continual pinching of the growing tip makes for a sturdier and more compact plant. Additionally, ensuring consistent moisture can slow the plant from bolting. Harvest seed when they begin turning brown but watch closely because seeds can be dispersed quickly. Dill is propagated by seed and is well known for self-seeding.

Foliage can be harvested at any time, as well as frozen or dried. Dill is a fragrant plant most familiar for its seeds being used in pickling recipes. The seeds and other plant parts are also used in various other culinary delights including fish, eggs, potatoes, corn, and salads. Add dill at the end of preparation to maintain flavor. Dill bruises easily, so be cautious when preparing for use and wait until the herb is needed before washing. The delicate fern-like foliage is a delight in fresh bouquets and a great pollinator plant that is a larval host for swallowtail butterflies.

Caraway (*Carum carvi*)-Annual or Biennial

Caraway is an annual or biennial that has both edible roots, leaves, and seeds making it both an herb and a spice. It can be seeded in the fall or spring (depending on whether it is an annual or biennial type). Full sun to part shade sites is best, and there

should be good drainage. Unlike many herbs, moisture can be an asset for caraway as it prefers soils with high moisture holding capacity. When the flowers give way to seed and the foliage dies, you can harvest the fruit and roots. Store seed in a cool, dark, low humidity location. Maintain moisture in the bed or container after seeding as caraway can be slow to germinate. Self-sowing is common with caraway as with Dill.

Although the seeds are used most often, both the roots and foliage are also used in cooking. Caraway is the seed that gives the licorice and anise undertones to rye bread. Tender young leaves add a vibrant zip to summer salads, and the seeds are commonly used to add flavor to cabbage, apple and other dishes in German, Austrian, and Hungarian traditions. Roots are dug and stored for later cooking similar to potato tubers.

Chervil (*Anthriscus cerefolium*)-Cool-season annual

Chervil is an herb that closely resembles parsley from southeastern Europe or Russia. It is also known as cow parsley and can reach about 2 feet in height. Considered a delicate, cool-season annual, chervil bolts quickly in warm temperatures. As with others in the family, chervil does not transplant well, so it is direct seeded and generally harvestable after 40-60 days. Chervil can perform well with partial shade and should have consistent moisture (no drought stress) and good drainage for best growth and quality. Harvest early and often, as allowing chervil to flower will alter the flavor of the plant, making it too bitter to enjoy. Chervil is grown from seed and can be direct seeded or transplanted as it can be slow to germinate.

Chervil has a short shelf life so it should be used fresh or frozen. A very common herb in French cuisine, chervil is one of the four herbs (along with tarragon, chives and parsley) that compose "fines herbes." It is used in rich, creamy sauces (Béarnaise), dry rubs, mild cheeses and compound butters. As a garnish, it should be added near the end of cooking to retain flavor.

Coriander/Cilantro (*Coriandrum sativum*)-Cool season annual

Cilantro is one of the most well-known culinary herbs that is also a spice due to the use of its seeds, which are actually a fruit. In warm regions, it is known as a cool season annual because of the tendency to flower quickly (bolt) and become more bitter during warm weather. Leaves can be harvested at any time but it can be a bit finicky, so it is common to be harvesting coriander when you may have intended to harvest cilantro. Coriander has a long history of human use with seed was discovered in ancient Egyptian tombs. Sites that has some afternoon shade can reduce stress and inducement to flower. Succession plantings in spring and fall can also be used for more consistent harvests throughout the season. Always harvest the newest leaves for best taste. Because of its pungency, insects usually avoid cilantro. Fresh use is ideal but cilantro can be frozen (which enhances the flavor) or dried. Roasting the seed releases more aromatic flavor compounds.

An interesting element of cilantro culinary use is that its flavor is perceived quite differently. Some consider it an essential part of many Latin American, Mexican, Indian and Thai dishes due to its citrusy, peppery and earthy flavor profile while others insist it tastes like dish soap. Coriander is popular ground and tossed in soups and curries. The whole seed is amazing when added to sausages and pickles.

Cumin (*Cuminum cyaminum*)-Annual

Cumin is a small (1 ft) herbaceous, warm season annual whose seed is harvested as a spice. Native to the Middle East and India, it is more well-known and prolific in more tropical climates. Moist but well drained soil is best. The leaves are feathery with pink flowers quickly transitioning to seed production. Cumin is a long season plant, so transplants should be started indoors for transplanting. During early growth stage, ensure adequate water supply by misting (do not overwater), as cumin does not tolerate dry conditions. Cumin is grown from seed but make sure seed in fresh as it does not have a long storage life for good germination. Pre-soaking seeds can speed up germination.

Cumin seeds are ready to harvest when the clusters turn brown and the pods crack easily. However, harvest is often time consuming as seeds do not all mature together. Drying is needed after harvest, and clusters of 4-6 stems are hung upside down in a brown paper bag for around a week to thoroughly dry. Seeds are boat shaped and turn from yellow to brownish-green when fully dried. Seeds are used whole or ground. Roasting before grinding can release more aroma.

Considered a versatile spice that provides a warm, earthy flavor common in Latin American and North African foods. It is used in the Netherlands' famous Leyden cheese as well as chili, barbecue, baked beans, curry dishes, and adobo seasoning. Pay attention to recipes, as seeds versus ground powder can be important for flavor.

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)-Perennial

Fennel is both as an annual and a perennial whose leaves and seeds are used. The main types for culinary uses are herb type (leaves used) or bulb types (compressed stem at base used). Green and bronze fennel are commonly grown as an herb and a garden ornamental that supports pollinators and self-seeds. It is increasingly common as an ornamental edible in both gardens and landscapes, so select for size and ornamental or edible uses. Fennel is native to southern Europe and prefers slightly acid soils with good organic matter, moisture and drainage. Pay attention to types when purchasing seed to ensure you are getting leaf or

bulb type as desired. Seeds can be sown early to produce transplants. In warm Tennessee summers, transplants can reduce the potential for bolting in summer heat.

Fennel imparts a strong licorice-anise flavor that is stronger raw. If using fronds (leaves), make sure to separate from bulb before storing in refrigerator. Upon cooking, the bulb becomes sweet and mild, adding a satisfying taste to fish as well as mellowing many meat dishes. Fennel is also used in sausage, German salad dishes, and as an addition to white wine cream sauces. And its use in making the spirit absinthe is also an important feature.

Lovage (*Levisticum officinale*)-Perennial (zone 5)

As is common with plants in the Apiaceae family, multiple plant parts can be used. Lovage actually hits the trifecta of plant utility with roots used as a vegetable, leaves as an herb, and seeds as a spice. This tall (3-4 feet), easy-to-grow, herbaceous perennial is native to the Mediterranean region. Lovage can tolerate partial shade, especially in hot summers, and grows best in well-drained, slightly acidic soils in sites with room to grow. As an herbaceous perennial, the foliage dies down in winter, and can be protected with a light mulch. Harvest outside stalks for use anytime during growing season, choosing young and tender leaves for best flavor. As with most members of the family, harvest before the herb sets flowers to achieve greatest flavor profile. This is the best time to harvest for roots as well. Propagates well by division. Seeds can also be started for transplants but should be stratified prior to sowing and do have a long germination window.

Lovage mimics the flavor of celery and can be used as a substitute, especially in areas where growing celery is a challenge. Use caution with the amount of lovage used as it has can have some limits to GRAS levels. Used in soups, stews, pastas, and salads, as well as tomato sauces and brined pickles. If freezing, make sure to blanch beforehand in oil or water, and store in an opaque container because light quickly yellows both the stems and leaves.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)-Biennial

Parsley is certainly an herb garden staple that is easy to grow and use. The two most common types are curly and Italian (also called flat). While technically a biennial, parsley is grown as an annual because it is the leaves (vegetative tissue) that are harvested, and the leaves become more tough and pungent in the second year when flowering. Italian (flat) is often sweeter than curly. Parsley should be sown in early spring (can withstand frost) for late spring or early summer harvest. Plant in partial shade and keep moist but do not overwater. Does well in containers or raised beds. Parsley is quick to bolt as the temperatures rise, so harvest frequently to encourage new growth and don't let it dry out. Parsley is grown from seed and can be direct seeded or transplanted.

Parsley is not just for garnish as it can be used to add to the plate and the food. Fresh use is best, but parsley can be frozen or dried if used relatively soon. It can also be used in compound butter and is ideal in soups, sauces, stews, broths, stocks, and braises. With its mild taste, parsley can be used to mellow stronger herbs during cooking to balance overall flavor profiles. Parsley is the key ingredient in salsa verde, tabbouleh, roux-based sauces, and falafel.

D. Culinary Herbs in the Composite Flower Family- Asteraceae

Tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*)-Perennial

The Latin name means little dragon and is a bit of a mystery as to its meaning. This plant is found in Europe, Asia and North America but cultivated types known as either Russian or French. Russian types are vigorous and can be seed propagated while French types are seed sterile and propagated only by division or cutting. So, select carefully for the type you prefer with French being more commonly used for culinary purposes. Plants should be established in a well-drained location in partial shade. Tarragon, a member of the Sunflower family, is drought and cold tolerant but hates the heat and high humidity. Frequent pruning will maintain shape and prevent lodging (falling over) and early flowering. Propagation via stem or root cuttings is relatively simple, or Russian tarragon can be started from seed.



The flavor profile of French tarragon yields notes of vanilla, fennel, licorice, and anise to be a good accompaniment to many meat dishes, especially chicken salad and fish dishes (crab cakes with tarragon aioli) and Béarnaise sauce. It is also often infused in vinegar and used for salad dressings. Drying is not recommended, as leaves lose their flavor quickly, so fresh is best (or freeze).

E. Other Culinary Herbs

Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum* and *Allium tuberosum*)-Perennial

There are several *Allium* species filling many culinary uses. Onions and garlic are primarily used for their bulbs so are classified as vegetables. Chives, though, is an herb grown for its leaves. Chives are not a prolific bulb producer, like onions or garlic, but they have been used as an herb in many applications for thousands of years. Chives are a cool-season perennial that have beautiful flowers as well as edible leaves and flowers. They are best planted in early spring in well-drained soil rich in organic matter with full sun. Chives grow in clumps of small, tender bulbs, producing green-blue leaves with variable flower colors, depending on variety. Mulching is a recommended practice because chives are so shallow rooted and water conservation is essential. If flowers are allowed to remain on plant, they self-sow prolifically and push their energy into seed production. If leaves/stems are preferred, snip flowers as soon as they appear. Division every three to four years is important to maintain vigor. Harvest leaves to base periodically throughout season starting with outer leaves. Flowers taste best after they are opened. Chives can be direct sown or transplanted. If direct sowing, they take a few weeks to germinate.



Chives leaves and flowers both impart a delicate onion flavor. They are best used fresh or frozen because dried leaves lose flavor quickly. Because of their dainty and delicate taste add them at the end of cooking. Snip chives into omelets, potatoes, fresh veggies, salads, and pasta. They are also used well in a compound butter for corn on the cob and baked potatoes or blended in cream cheese as a spread for pastries. Chive flowers make great additions to salads and hor d'oeuvres or can be infused with vinegar for two weeks. Chives are a primary ingredient in fines herbs mixture.

Garlic chives are quite similar to European chives with flatter leaves and a more grass-like appearance. Leaves have a mild garlic flavor with white flowers. Garlic chives are not as forgiving to cold weather as common chives. Also known as Chinese chives, as they are native to eastern Asia and common in that region's cuisine. Garlic chives are more often cooked in dishes, rather than being used as a garnish due to their stronger flavor profile. Excellent used in Asian style dishes like stir-fries and spring rolls.

Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*)-Perennial

True to its common name, this is a heat-loving edible grass native to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines. Plant after the threat of spring frost has passed in a full sun site with well-drained soil that has high organic matter. In contrast to many herbs, the tropical lemongrass does not weather drought well and performs best with consistent watering. It does not overwinter in Tennessee but does grow well in pots, so growing and moving inside during winter can enable plants to be used in subsequent years. The bluish-green leaves of lemongrass also make it interesting as an edible ornamental in home landscapes. Cut individual stalks close to the ground once they reach a foot high, but only harvest 1/3 of the plant at a time. Dividing every two to three years is recommended. Propagation is often by division as side shoots are produced and easy to remove and root.

The flavor is lemony with a hint of ginger, and it makes a tasty addition to rice, smoothies, stir-fries and soups. The inner, white core of the stalks is also used for flavoring soups and teas but is removed prior to eating. Always blanch stalks prior to use to lessen the bitter tones. The leaves are used for tea or broth, as they are too tough/fibrous for chewing. Never eat uncooked lemongrass. Primarily used in Thai and Vietnamese dishes. An important added note is that some pets can have stomach upset from consuming lemongrass.



Terminology

Herbes de Provence is an aromatic all-purpose seasoning that originated in the Provence region of France.

Fines herbs is commonly used in mild flavored dishes to provide a pleasantly subtle flavor. Fines are added at the end of cooking to prevent excessive heat or cooking from depleting their gentle aroma and flavor.

Compound butter, also known as *beurre*, is a whipped mixture of butter and supplementary ingredients. Herbs, spices and/or aromatic liquids are added to enhance flavor. It is used in a fashion similar to a sauce that is melted on top of meats and vegetables or used as a spread or used to finish various sauces.

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