

Culinary Herbs

Next to my vegetable garden, I love my herb garden. For one reason, I can go out into my herb garden and pick fresh herbs and use them in my recipes. For another reason, herbs are an aromatic paradise for your senses. Some herbs like basil, sage, rosemary and oregano are very strong or pungent and others, like lavender and thyme, are milder. Herbs may be used fresh, dried for future use or sold at one of the many Delaware Farmers Markets.

Nine Popular Kitchen Herbs

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), **Chives** (*Allium schoenoprasum*), **Dill** (*Anethum graveolens*), **Lemon Balm** (*Melissa officinalis*), **Oregano** (*Origanum vulgare subsp. hirtum*), **Parsley** (*Petroselinum crispum*), **Rosemary** (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), **Sage** (*Salvia officinalis*) and **Thyme** (*Thymus vulgaris*).

Soil and Growing Requirements

Unlike most plants, herbs are not picky about their soil; however, they do not like wet feet, so they should be grown in well-drained soil. They require six or seven hours of sunlight a day.

Propagation

Seeds of Basil, Chives, Lemon Balm, Oregano, Parsley, Sage and Thyme need to be started indoors four to six weeks before the last frost in the spring.

Divide Chives, Lemon Balm, Oregano, Sage and Thyme plants in spring or early fall.

Growing, Harvesting and Use Guide

Cooking tip: One teaspoon of dried herb is equal to one tablespoon of fresh herb.

To ensure optimal herb flavors crush leaves just before using.

Basil-Ocimum basilicum (Annual)

Start seeds and transplant to the herb garden after danger of frost has passed. Space transplants eight inches apart in well-drained soil.

Harvest leaves all summer long. For longer harvest, don't let the plants flower.

Dry whole leaves and store them in an air-tight container. Use in breads, butters, cheeses, eggs, meats, salads, sauces, vegetables and vinegars.

Chives- Allium schoenoprasum (Perennial)

Start seeds in the spring and transplant nine inches apart in the herb garden. Divide clumps every three years in the spring or early fall. Chives like well-drained soil, and will tolerate poorer soils.

To harvest, cut leaves leaving two or three inches for re-growth.

Store fresh Chive leaves in an air tight container in the refrigerator for up to a week. Dry leaves and store in air-tight container.

Use leaves in breads, butters, cheeses, eggs, fish, meats, salads, sauces, vegetables and vinegars.

Dill-Anethum graveolens (Annual)

Direct seed or transplant 10 inches apart in the garden. Dill easily drops seeds to produce new plants. It thrives in rich, well-drained soils.

Protect this tall plant from harsh winds. To harvest cut young leaves, pick flowers just as seeds begin to form, or wait until seed heads turn brown. Hang brown seed heads upside down in a paper bag to dry.

Use leaves or seeds in breads, butters, cheeses, eggs, fish, meats, salads, sauces, vegetables and vinegars.



Lemon Balm-*Melissa officinalis* (Perennial)

Start seeds in early spring and transplant 15 inches apart outdoors. Divide or take cuttings in the spring or fall. Lemon Balm likes full sun and tolerates moist soils.

Use fresh leaves in teas and vinegars. Dried leaves are used in fish, meats, sauces, vegetables and poultry dishes.

Oregano-*Origanum vulgare subsp. hirtum* (Perennial)

Start seeds in early spring and transplant 15 inches apart in the garden. Divide mature plants in the spring or fall. Oregano plants thrive in full sun and in well-drained, alkaline soils. Harvest leaves anytime before the plant produces flowers. Be sure to allow plants time to re-grow before late fall.

Dry or freeze leaves for use in breads, butters, cheeses, eggs, meats, salads, sauces, and vegetable dishes.

Parsley-*Petroselinum crispum* (Biennial)

Start Parsley seeds early in the spring and then transplant outdoors after danger of frost has passed. Parsley loves well-drained soil and full sun to semi-shade. It will flower the second year. To harvest, cut Parsley leaves and use fresh or dried.

Use in breads, butters, cheeses, eggs, fish, salads, sauces, and vegetables.

Rosemary-*Rosmarinus officinalis* (Perennial)

Cuttings should be taken in late summer. Transplant outdoors when plants have grown roots. Space transplants in the garden 24 inches apart. Grow Rosemary in well-drained, alkaline soils, and in full sun. Protect plants from severe winter temperatures and winds. This evergreen herb may be picked fresh all year long.

Use in breads, butters, cheeses, eggs, fish, jellies, meats, sauces, teas and vegetable dishes.

Sage-*Salvia officinalis* (Perennial)

Start seeds in the spring and transplant in the garden, spacing about 20 inches apart. Grow in well-drained, alkaline soils and in full sun. Prune Sage plants after flowering. Dry leaves or use fresh. The purple flowers may be used fresh in salads.

Use Sage in breads, butters, cheeses, meats, sauces and teas.

Thyme-*Thymus vulgaris* (Perennial)

Start seeds in the spring and transplant outdoors spacing 12 inches apart. Divide mature plants in the spring or early fall. Grow in full sun and well-drained, alkaline soils. Dry leaves and store in an air-tight container or use fresh.

Use in breads, butters, cheeses, eggs, fish, meats, salads, sauces, vegetables and vinegars.

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