

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER



February 18

Herbs to Grow Indoors and Outdoors

Imagine having a fresh supply of herbs available to add flavor to food while cooking in the kitchen. Some herbs grow easily in containers, raised beds, in the ground, or indoors. Plant them with other landscape plants as well.

What are herbs? Herbs are plants used for fragrance, flavoring foods, medicinal purposes, and pigments to use as dyes. They are easy to grow with few pests and diseases. Most herbs grow best in full sun. Exposure to bright sunlight increases the essential oil concentration and produces a higher quality product.

Many herbs tolerate a wide range of soil conditions with the exception of wet, poorly drained soils. If the garden soil is poorly drained, improve drainage by planting them in a raised bed. Another solution is to grow them in containers filled with potting soil. Garden soil placed in pots does not drain well and may carry disease and insect pests.

In general, herbs do better in soils of low to medium fertility, so additional fertilizer applications are usually not needed. Soils with high fertility tend to produce lots of foliage low in flavor. Keep this in mind when fertilizing them in containers with potting soil. Follow the label on the fertilizer container and monitor the plants.

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Growing herbs on a windowsill in potting soil or through a hydroponic system provides easy access to them. If bright sunlight is not available, supplemental lighting may be required. A specific light for growing plants or a combination of cool white and warm white fluorescent tubes will work. LED lights may be used also.

Numerous herbs can be grown outdoors and indoors. Dill, chives, sage, and sweet basil are described in this article.

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) foliage and seeds are used to flavor pickles, vinegars, dips, sauces, garden salads, and potato salad. I remember dill growing in my grandmother's garden for her dill pickles. Dill is an annual that grows 2 to 4 feet tall. The foliage is feathery and blue-green in color. Dill provides a lacy background for smaller herbs in the garden. When in bloom, a flat flower head is formed by many tiny yellow flowers.

Sow dill seeds directly in the garden or container. Full sun is best. After the seedlings emerge from the soil, thin them to one plant every 8 to 10 inches. Dill can become weedy because the seeds that fall from the plant emerge the next year.

Dill foliage can be harvested anytime. The seeds are harvested just as they ripen to a light brown color.

Chive (*Allium schoenoprasum*) is a perennial plant belonging to the onion family. Chive leaves add a mild onion-like flavor to dips, soups, salads, casseroles, and most vegetables. The small bulbous plants grow in clumps and produce 8- to 12-inch-long leaves that are narrow, hollow, and somewhat grass-like. In May, the plants produce small, attractive lavender flowers.

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Chive plants are started from bulbs, similar to onion sets, or from seed. Once growing, divide clumps in early spring, keeping five to six bulblets for each new start. Chives grow prolifically and spread rapidly.

Cut the fresh chive leaves as needed during the growing season. A few clumps from outside can be potted in late fall and kept indoors on a sunny windowsill, so the fresh leaves are available throughout the winter.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is an aromatic and slightly bitter herb noted for its use in flavoring poultry stuffing, pork, and fish. Sage is a shrubby perennial with one-inch oblong, wooly, wrinkled, gray-green leaves. The plant grows to a height of 2 feet and has a tendency to sprawl unless it is kept trimmed. Lilac blue flower spikes appear in June.

Sage should be planted in full sun and moderately rich, well-drained soil when growing in the garden. Plants can be started from seeds, stem cuttings, or from crown divisions. Transplants should be spaced 18 to 24 inches apart. Harvest the leaves before the plants bloom. Leaves of sage can be used fresh or dried.

Sweet basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is an easy annual herb to grow from seed. It is used to flavor soups, vegetables, and tomato dishes. The leaves should be harvested before the plant blooms. Leaves are glossy green in color. They can be used fresh, frozen, or dried.

Depending on the cultivar, the plant height ranges from 24 to 36 inches tall. Sweet basil planted in containers outside your door makes it easily accessible. It also makes a nice addition to the flower border or flower garden. The flower color is white or lavender, depending on the cultivar. However, the flower is not important when using the leaves for seasoning. Remove the flower stalks as they form to encourage the growth of more leaves.

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For more information about growing herbs, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or [annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

## **Annette's Tip:**

A publication on "Culinary Herbs" is available at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ho/ho74/ho74.pdf> or at an Extension office.

## **Upcoming Events:**

"Decoding the Secrets When Planting Vegetable Seeds" will be presented on February 21 at 2:00 p.m. at the Daviess County Public Library and live streamed at [www.facebook.com/dcplibrary](http://www.facebook.com/dcplibrary). Vegetable seed descriptions, which contain many symbols and codes, will be discussed. The Seed Library will open that day.

Owensboro Regional Farmers' Market Sign-up Meeting is February 21 at 6:00 p.m. at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office, 4800A New Hartford Road, Owensboro.

"New and Beginning Beekeeping: Spring and Summer Beekeeping Practices" is February 23 at 6:00 p.m. at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office.

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