

SUMMER'S AROMATIC BOUNTY

The Ten Best Herbs for Culinary, Medicinal and Aesthetic Purposes

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Culture and Care of your herb plants:

- Grow herbs in full sun area
- Herbs must be contained as they are very invasive
- Plant in a well drained soil
- Augment with well rotted manure spring and fall
- Cut herbs frequently for use and to prevent them from seeding
- Water in the morning periods to prevent disease
- Fertilize with 20.20.20 to give the herbs a boost in the summer
- Do not use pesticides, use a companion planting guide

Herbs

1. Basil



This annual or short-lived perennial has square stems, toothed leaves with a strong, fresh, clove-like scent, and small, white, scented late-summer flowers.

Uses:

The warm spicy taste of the leaf combines well with garlic, tomatoes, eggplant, and Italian dishes. (Please email me if you would like some wonderful Italian and Greek recipes that are heart smart and great for summer entertaining.)

Basil flavors vinegar, pesto sauce, and oil. The essential oil is ideal for condiments and scented soaps and perfumes. Leaves can be used as a mosquito repellent, insect bites and acne. The fragrance is grounding and can be use as a mild anti-depressant. I dry this plant in a warm dry place and use throughout the winter in salads, soups and teas.

2. Chamomile



This aromatic evergreen has feathery, apple scented leaves, white flowers and golden centers.

Uses:

Flowers are used for a digestive, soothing, and sedative tea. Helps promote sleep and prevent nightmares.

Sometimes use for suppressing nausea. Warm tea bags are used for inflammation and dark shadows under the eyes. Chamomile is anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and disinfectant qualities, helps to treat rashes, toothache and earaches. It is known in the garden as the "physician plant", reviving nearby ailing plants.

3. French Tarragon



This multi-branched perennial has greenish flowers and narrow leaves whose bitter-sweet, peppery taste has anise flavours.

Uses:

Essential to French cuisine, for savory foods. I use this plant for flavouring shrimp and

Portobello mushrooms. The leaves contain iodine, mineral salts, and vitamins A and C. Leaf tea stimulates the appetite, is a digestive, and a general tonic. Chewing leaves before taking bitter medicine helps to numb the taste buds. The root helps to reduce a toothache. Great plant for understanding the power of taste!

4. Lavender



There are 28 species of these aromatic, evergreen, shrubby perennials, all with small, linear leaves and spikes of fragrant, usually purple or blue, two-lipped flower.

Uses: The number one essential oil for healing as the aromatic oil glands cover all aerial parts of the plants but are found mainly in the flowers. Flowers flavour jams, vinegars and are crystallized for decoration. At

Homewood we dry the flowers for long lasting fragrance for use in sachets and potpourri. Flower water is a skin toner useful for speedy cell renewal and is an antiseptic for acne. Flower tea treats anxiety, headaches and halitosis. The essential oil is a highly valued perfume and healer. It is antiseptic, mildly sedative, and painkilling. It is applied to insect bites and treats burns, sore throats, and headaches. When teaching aroma therapy classes I recommend 3 drops of essential oil to baths as a relaxant. I also use this plant for grounding, insomnia and depression. Ideal for minor glue gun burns. My great grandfather was a Yardley. This company exported Yardley products (lavender) to Canada in the early 1900's. My grandmother used lavender soap and perfume for cleaning and moth prevention in her linens.

5. Lemon Balm



This fast growing bushy herb has square stems, lemon scented foliage, and late summer flowers that mature from white or yellow to pale blue.

Uses:

Fresh leaves add a delicate flavour to many dishes, oils, vinegars, and liqueurs, providing a relaxing bath, soothe insect bites, and makes a sedative and tonic tea. This tea has a reputation for giving longevity and soothes headaches, indigestion, and nausea. Extracts of lemon balm are antiviral and help clean and heal wounds by starving bacteria of oxygen. The refreshing, antidepressant essential oil helps some eczema and allergy sufferers. Great for improving memory!

This lemon smell goes directly to the brain for emotional balance and energy.

6. Sage



Sage is an aromatic evergreen with gray-green textured leaves and mauve-blue flowers in summer.

Uses:

Sage leaf has a strong taste that increases when dried. Used sparingly to flavour and aid the digestion of fatty meats. It is popular in poultry stuffing and combines well with strongly flavoured foods. The flowers are tossed in salads and can be brewed for a light balsamic tea, while the leaf is an antiseptic nerve and blood tonic. Sage is ideal for cleansing the hair and an anti wrinkle agent. The pores on the underside of the leaf mirror the pores of our skin. During our psycho-aromatherapy programs we use this plant for making skin creams and a decongestant.

7. Spearmint



Most mints are creeping plants that hybridize easily, producing infinite variations. They have erect, square, branching stems, aromatic foliage, and flowers in leaf axils.

Uses:

Flavours sauces, vinegar, vegetables, and desserts. Their teas are popular in the alcohol free Arab world. Oils have a mild anesthetic action and a cool refreshing taste. They flavour candy, drinks, cigarettes, toothpaste and medicines. Mints are stimulants; they aid digestion and reduce flatulence. It is included in ointments and cold remedies and is given for aches and pains. When inhaled the essential oil treats shock and nausea. I use this plant with lavender for a soothing cream for headaches and foot cleansing and circulation.

8. Sweet Woodruff



This woodland herb has a red-brown, creeping rootstalk, attractive 'ruffs' of six to nine elliptic leaves at intervals on the stem, and small clusters of brilliant white flowers in the spring.

Uses:

The smell is a wonderful wave of sweet, new-mown-hay.

The scent of coumarin in the leaves develops only as the leaves dry out, so they must be picked several hours before use. They are good for flavouring sorbets and fruit salads. When I was lecturing in China the hosts served me a refreshing leaf tea that was both energizing and soothing.

Sweet Woodruff can be used for a liver tonic, antispasmodic and for stomach pains. Bruised fresh leaves are anticoagulant for wounds. Dried leaves deter insects; act as a fixative in potpourri, and scent linen.

9. Thyme



Thyme is a much-branching sub shrub with woody stems; numerous small, pointed, strongly aromatic, medium green leaves; and lilac summer flowers.

Uses:

Culinary Thyme aids the digestion of fatty foods. It is ideal for the long, slow cooking of stews and soups. Thyme oil is distilled from the leaves and flowering tops and is stimulant and antiseptic. It is a nerve tonic used externally to treat depression, colds, muscular pain, and respiratory problems. The oil is added to acne lotions soaps and mouthwashes.

10. Rosemary



An aromatic perennial that must be brought in before frost. A wonderful herb for strengthening memory, purifying the air, and a must for cooking with meat. Known as "Dew of the Sea"

Uses:

Rosemary is ideal for salads, flavouring baked potatoes and herb butter. Stimulates blood circulation and is good for depression. Aids digestion of fats and is good for joint pain. Can be used as an antiseptic gargle and mouth wash.

SUMMATION:

All horticultural therapy programs must include the world of herbs into their programs. For many centuries herbs have been used for religious, cultural, culinary and aesthetic values. Herbs stimulate the senses, promote healing and aid in the recovery process. As a Registered Horticultural Therapist and Aromatherapy Health Practitioner there are many benefits of working with herbs:

Working with herbs promotes a natural source of wellness for mind body and soul

- Herbs provide a plethora of uses from culinary, complimentary alternative medicine, healing fragrances to aesthetic purposes.
- Herbs stimulate the hypothalamus (the hormone command centre of the body) and limbic system (the seat of emotions).
- Herbaceous scented material stimulates the sense of smell that promotes memory, lessens pain and provides balance for the body.
- The fragrance of herbs can promote reality and lower anxiety through a healing space.
- The art of working with herbs can lessen fear by promoting grounding and safety through a healing space.
- The sense of smell has a key effect on our behavioural patterns, learning and interpretation.
- Tasting and touching herbs stimulate the memory response and promote reality
- Working with herbs promotes both right and left brain activity.
- Working with herbs promotes a meaningful activity that alters' patients mood and enhance or rehabilitates emotional and physical well-being.
- Herb gardens provide relief from anxiety and stress, and an outlet for creativity and imagination
- Herb gardens introduce concepts of spirituality and nature and healing spaces
- Working with multi-sensual material re-awakens hope, promotes a meaningful activity and quality of life.
- Working with herbs promotes physical exercise and fine motor skills.
- Herbs promote beauty and enhance the flavour of food.
- Herbs provide an enriching experience to promote dignity and quality of life.

Gardening exercises the body and nurtures the soul.

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