

HERB APPEAL

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A garden just has to have some herbs! Not only do herbs enhance the taste of our food, but they are also very ornamental and look as good in the vegetable garden as they do in a flower bed. Some gardeners develop small, sometimes elaborate, gardens containing just herbs; others may intermingle them with their vegetable crops. The seed racks are now full of herb selections and the garden centers have a good supply of started plants. The cooler weather that we can expect this fall and winter is the perfect growing condition for many herbs.

Basil is perhaps the first herb that people think of when they want to grow their own herbs. The colorful leaves, varied scents and vigorous growth of this herb are outstanding. Select large-leaved types such as 'Lettuce Leaf' or 'Genovese' for a more traditional basil treat. Purple-leaved basil is also available and equally beautiful - 'Purple Ruffles' is a good cultivar. There are also dwarf mound-shaped varieties such as 'Spicy Globe', and specialty scented varieties like 'Cinnamon' and 'Lime'. I usually start my basil patch by preparing a planting bed in a full sun to part-shade area. I broadcast the seeds over the approximately three feet by six-foot area and gently rake the seed in so that it is covered with a quarter-inch of soil. Make sure to thin the seedlings to six to twelve inches apart. You will get plenty of basil from multiple cuttings of this annual plant. Keep cutting it back to prevent flower production which will make annual basil go to seed. I usually have both a spring and fall crop which provides me with plenty of fresh and dried basil.

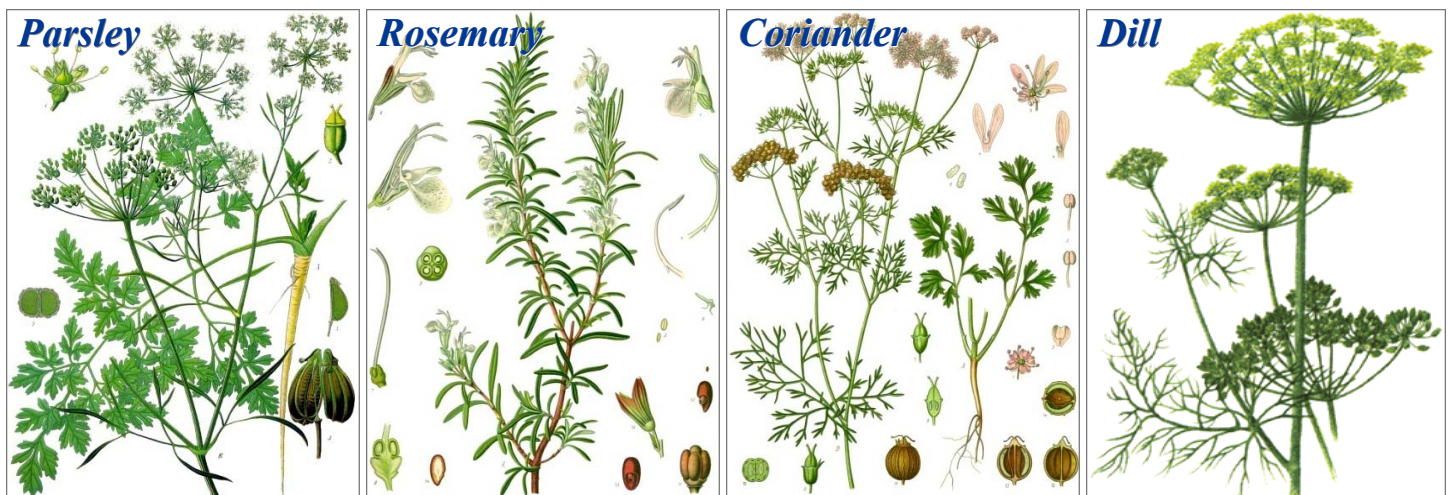


Basil

Dill is a great herb that can provide both leaves and fruiting tops that produce seed for seasoning. Dill actually grows best in the cooler part of the year in Florida and is ideally planted in November and December. While many dill varieties grow up to four feet tall, there are smaller cultivars available. The yellow flowers are followed by seed which is formed in about 65 days from planting. Sow the seeds just like basil and thin plants to about 12 inches apart.

Parsley is another herb that performs well for me during our cool season. While the curly types such as 'Moss Curled' are grown as a colorful garnish, the

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flat-leaved varieties ('Plain Leaf') are often used in cooking. There is even a rooting type called 'Hamburg Root' that is grown to be used as cooked vegetable in soups. This is another herb that I plant in wide patches thinning the plants to about six-inches apart. Parsley is actually a biennial as it produces foliage the first year and then produces a flower and seed the next.

Rosemary is very different type of herbs as it is actually a small shrub. In fact, I have seen gardens where rosemary was sheared into interesting shapes that bring an ornamental quality to the landscape. While there are many cultivars from short and spreading to spiky and upright, most rosemary plants are about two to three foot tall with dark green needle-like leaves and small pink flowers. Easily propagated from cuttings, rosemary is useful for its mild, bitter-tasting leaves that can used fresh or dried.

Coriander is another easily grown herb in our area. Again, now is a good time to plant the seeds, about a quarter-inch deep just like many of the other herbs, and thin to three to six plants per foot. This herb has attractive flowers followed by brown fruits. The dried fruits are then threshed to remove the seeds used in cooking. The fresh leaves of coriander are called cilantro and are commonly used to flavor many popular dishes.

If you only have a small space, herbs also grow just as well in containers as they do in gardens. I could go on to describe many other herbs, but you will have to pick your own favorites. Check local garden centers or Internet seed catalogs for their herb selections. We have a great publication called "Herbs in the Florida Garden" which can be found at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/VH/VH02000.pdf>, or pick one up at our office.

Resource:

Illustrations courtesy of:
www.wikipedia.com

Stephens, J.M. (2003) *Herbs in the Florida Garden*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Vegetable Varieties for Gardeners (2008) Cornell Cooperative Extension.

For information on herbs, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte.

MONTHLY PLANT CLINICS ARE SATURDAYS FROM 9:00AM-12:00PM.

- **Powell's Nursery** 1st Saturday of month
- **Peachland Publix**..... 2nd Saturday of month
- **Home Depot (Punta Gorda, Port Charlotte, Englewood)** 3rd Saturday of month
- **Lowes** 4th Saturday of month

PLANT CLINICS AVAILABLE ACROSS THE COUNTY:

- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Punta Gorda Library** 2nd and 4th Wednesday of month from 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** (13577 Blake Drive, PC) 3rd Wednesday of month from 9:00am-12:00pm.

Ralph Mitchell (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com) is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for Charlotte County Extension Service. Contact a volunteer Master Gardener from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4351. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.