

## An indoor herb garden

Having an herb garden is an easy and pretty way to improve the taste of most foods. There is something rustic and relaxing about going out to cut fresh rosemary, thyme, or whatever – even the blandest vegetables taste better with the addition of something fresh and savory from the garden. Keeping things growing outdoors when temperatures are lower than 40° is tricky, but herbs lend themselves to growing indoors, like houseplants, without much effort.

The first gardening concern is “what do you want to see?” Here, it is “what do you want to taste?”

Basil and oregano thrive on a bright window sill, as will many of the most common herbs. Lots of people use mint for digestion; so simple to grow. Garlic, thyme, and parsley all thrive in the kitchen garden; even one literally in the kitchen.

First, decide what to plant. Transplants are rarely available at this time of year, but seeds are easy to start. The seed selection is limited but probably a few will be worth having.

Seed prices usually drop in late fall, so resist the temptation to buy more than you can use.

Choose pots you want to look at –attractive glazed or decorative plastic pots are reasonably priced, so do find ones you really like. Fill them with moist potting mix and follow the seed package directions for planting.

Most common herbs germinate within two weeks, but the package will have specific information on germination times, or if you need to soak seeds before planting. In general, place a seed about as deep as its diameter. If one is an eighth of an inch across, plant it just a trifle more than an eighth of an inch deep.

Then find a bright window – the kitchen or dining area is probably best, but anywhere with bright light for about six hours, and ready access to water, will do.

Keep the soil evenly moist – like a moist sponge – and the little plants should be ready to start using in about a month. They will not be as big as those outside. You will not have enough basil to make pesto with just a couple of pots, but there will be enough to season sauces or be a garnish.

Herbs can be annuals, biennials or perennials. When basil, dill, savory and parsley flower, they develop an off taste and die. The flowers are seldom terribly attractive. Unless you are saving seeds, remove the flower stalk and a few leaves beneath it. That can “fool” the plant into resuming leaf production. Perennials like sage and rosemary continue to produce leaves after flowering, but pinching improves their shape.

The things we grow for seasoning are really just little plants. While we grow them for taste, herbs can be attractive. An indoor herb garden can be a year-round enterprise; not only for



cold weather. When the summer is so hot that nobody wants to leave the air conditioning, a little garden inside can be a welcome hint of the outdoors.

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