

Herb gardens



Herb garden at the Demonstration Gardens

Herb gardens can be some of the easiest to establish, maintain and use. Of course, there is no real definition of herb, but we generally describe it as a plant that is not a tree, vine or shrub. It frequently (not always) has a flavor or an aroma that is noticeable. Many of them have a history as medicines. Before people had local pharmacies where they could obtain medication for their various ailments, they went out to the garden or field to find whatever remedies were growing around. The healing properties of some herbs are widely proclaimed, such as aloe for burns and other skin problems.

Even if people do not now produce fennel and mint to ease an upset stomach, or grow “rosemary for remembrance” as old English herbalists would say, they are still attractive plants that will survive in the Southern Nevada environment.

Although we rarely rely on herbs to deal with our infirmities, many of them are pretty and easy to grow. Gardeners in this region have good reason to complain about our challenging conditions, but with just a little attention, many herbs grow easily in Southern Nevada landscapes, and even more are perfect for a windowsill garden.

Here are a few herbs for Southern Nevada. They thrive in full sun, although they may not all do well during the hottest days of July and August.

Aloe is the genus of a large number of desert plants that are common in xeriscape. Some can grow to be four feet tall and as just as wide. Since they did not originate in the Mojave, they need to be protected from chilling.

Fennel will grow to be four to five feet tall. When planting, put them in the ground about one foot apart.

Some of us think of *garlic* as a vegetable, even a food group unto itself, but for others, it is a culinary herb. This, despite research indicating it may be beneficial for anything from atherosclerosis to tuberculosis. Individual cloves are planted, pointed end up - four inches deep and four inches apart – in the fall and harvested in the spring. Healthy plants have rich



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green leaves that contrast with other colors in the garden. They are also reputed to repel insects and diseases from other plants.

Peppermint is often used for digestion. It will grow up to three feet tall. Set the plants about 18” apart. To prevent it from overrunning the entire garden, however, plant the whole pot.

Rosemary is so common in Southern Nevada landscapes that we might forget it is an herb. In addition to its supposed memory-improving properties, some research indicates it might be a baldness cure! Some varieties can grow to six feet tall, although a more prostrate cultivar is widely used.

At the Duke University Medical School, there is a demonstration herb garden as part of its History of Medicine collection. The University of Maryland has an extensive list of herbs and their medicinal uses, along with precautions concerning them.

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