

Indoors & edibles

Is any kitchen complete without a few potted herbs growing in the window, waiting to be harvested, as fresh as any seasoning can be? Many gardeners think not. While it is easy to have a year-round garden in Southern Nevada, there are times when just a few fresh leaves – basil, oregano, mint – are all that a meal needs to make it wonderfully flavorful. Going out to the garden to clip some rosemary when it is chilly and dark might not be an attractive option.

For many popular herbs, the leaves are the most desirable parts. This is so fortunate, since leafy plants can generally thrive in a kitchen window. As long as they are watered regularly and the window permits relatively bright, indirect light, plants will send out leaves merrily (if a plant could be called merry).

While some plants, like mint and rosemary, generally should be grown from cuttings, there are others that are simple to start from seed. Those that do best from cuttings are often perennials, while the others are annuals.



Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is one of the simplest herbs, and growing one's own means considerably more variety. Most of the available plants are simply common basil – green oval leaves and white flowers. Tasty, for sure, but other varieties can be highly decorative and just as flavorful. Among these are 'Purple Ruffles' and 'Opal'. These plants have deep purple leaves and lavender flowers. Purple ruffles leaves are indeed purple as long as they receive sufficient light, and the leaves are frilled, making it highly ornamental. If it is grown in a dimmer situation, the leaves will not reach their full color. Nonetheless, it would still be flavorful.

Seeds are available in many garden centers and online at many gardening supply sites. Whatever variety selected, it should be planted in a good potting mix and a pot with adequate drainage. Indoor pots can be clay, although we do not recommend clay for outdoors.

Do not use a planter without a drainage hole. Some people have been told that putting rocks in the bottom of such a planter would take care of its drainage, but this is not so. What happens instead is a muddy airless swamp where nothing but certain bacteria can grow.

Plant the seeds about ¼ inch deep in a well moistened, but not wet, mix. They will usually germinate, with small plants appearing in a week or so, depending on the seeds and growing conditions.

Because most basil varieties are annuals, it is important to keep them from producing seed. Once an annual has flowered and created seeds, then that plant will soon die. Fooling a plant is not difficult, fortunately. Pinching back the plant will make it grow bushier, and prevent flowering. Once the plant looks as if it has a dense vegetative area at the end of a stem, remove that area of

the stem, and an inch below it. This tricks the plant into generating more leaves. The flowers are as tasty as the leaves so do not discard them.

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