



Add a dash of homegrown ZEST TO YOUR DIET

Proper soil preparation and nurturing of herbs will add variety to your plate and palate

By Sandra Frost

Remember the pungent smell of dill weed crushed in your hand?

The clean, fresh smell of lavender?

The taste of zesty basil in your lasagna?

Herbs, with proper soil preparation and care, can be grown for culinary uses, dyes, fragrances, and ornamental plantings.

Herbs have terrific attributes that make them suitable for Wyoming. Many prefer cool climates and will survive cold winters. They often prefer well-drained soils in full sunshine.

Herbs also have few pests or diseases. They grow well in most garden soils without additional nitrogen fertilizer and can be grown in containers on patios as well as in the ground.

Herbs may be annuals, biennials, or perennial plants.

Although sandy-loam soil textures may be best for herbs, other soil textures can be amended to suit herbs. Adding organic matter can loosen a clay soil and provide drainage. The organic matter may be compost, aged manure, or sphagnum peat moss. Raised beds consisting of layers of organic matter and soil above ground level may also solve a poor drainage problem because plant roots may not reach down to the underlying saturated soil.

Sandy soils can be amended with organic matter to hold some water and nutrients. Herbs do well in soils

close to neutral pH 7.0. The University of Wyoming Soil Testing Laboratory can perform soil fertility testing on samples sent to the lab. Test results include pH, nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorous levels and recommendations for amending the soil. Contact your local UW Cooperative Extension Service office for more information. Garden centers sell simple pH test kits that can give a general range of pH.

Some widely used culinary herbs are drought tolerant: marjoram, oregano, savory, and thyme. Only a few herbs do well in moist soils: mint, angelica and lovage. There are herbs that will do well in shade or part-shade: angelica, catnip, chamomile, lovage, tarragon, thyme, parsley, and mint.

Herbs may be started by seed, propagated from cuttings, divided from existing plants, propagated by layering stems to the ground, or purchased as transplants.



Consider growing these herbs



Basil

An annual, is transplanted outside. Leaves are used with meats, soups, salads, and sauces such as pesto.



Caraway

A biennial sown directly outside. It grows to 15 inches tall and has prolific seed production. Caraway is used in pickles, baking, and vegetable dishes.



Chives

Hardy perennials that grow in clumps in full sun. Fresh chives are used in baked potatoes, cream soups, and egg dishes.



Dill

An annual, can be seeded directly outside. It reseeds itself so well you never have to plant it again! Both leaves and seeds are used in salads, pickling, vinegars, and vegetable dishes.



Lavender

A perennial from the Mediterranean. "Hidcote" may tolerate the colder temperatures of Wyoming. Lavender is used in culinary dishes, sachets, and oils.



Rosemary

A woody plant not hardy in Wyoming, is grown as an annual. Purchase seedlings to set out. Leaves are used in meats, soups, and salads.



Thyme

A perennial that can serve as a ground cover as well as a culinary herb used in meats, casseroles, fish, soups, and vegetables.

For more information, see:

- "Gardening: Growing herbs in Wyoming" at <http://ces.uwyo.edu/PUBS/B1144.pdf> provides information about specific herbs, including whether an annual, biennial, or perennial, hardiness zone, planting instructions, plant part to use, culinary uses, and comments.
- "Add some spice to your life – herb and spice lists" suggests herb and spice combinations for meats and vegetables. http://ces.uwyo.edu/PUBS/Mp121_3.pdf

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