

How to Add Culinary Herbs To Your Organic Garden

I have found that adding various herbs to my garden has brought many wonderful benefits. Of course, it is always wonderful to go out and pick some fresh herbs to add to your favorite dinner recipes. Additional benefits include the variety of colors and textures they provide to your vegetable garden, how well they attract pollinators, and how many herbs act as excellent pest control.

In my opinion, there is no such thing as an herb which is only worthwhile as a culinary herb. All herbs offer important health benefits and healing properties. Using herbs in your everyday life will support you with anti-oxidants, vitamins and minerals – all important for preventative medicine. Each plant also contains specific uplifting, energizing, soothing, anti-septic or other qualities that we often need or desire.

Favorite Culinary Herbs in the Garden

GARLIC: Ahhhh, don't you just love the aroma of fresh garlic roasting in the oven or browning in your favorite stir fry? Who doesn't love garlic bread, black bean sauce with garlic, lamb baked with cloves of garlic pushed into the meat? Garlic also has numerous medicinal qualities; it has been proven to be intensely anti-septic, and various medical studies have shown that it melts plaque out of arteries and lowers bad cholesterol levels. It will also kill off excess candida in the intestinal tract without harming beneficial bacteria. Whenever I have patients with earaches, I recommend "garlic and mullein oil" drops on a cotton ball in the ear canal; the garlic is very warming and anti-bacterial, and the mullein helps to break up and draw out any mucous. Garlic is also a great plant in the garden for fending off problem insects such as aphids and white cabbage moths; I often intersperse a few plants throughout my vegetable garden, as well as growing a huge crop of it for culinary and medicinal purposes. A clove of garlic a day keeps the doctor away !

MARJORAM: This very tender plant provides leaves which add a wonderful flavor to soups, marinara sauces, salad dressings, pasta dishes, etc. In our growing zone 4-5, plant in pots and bring them indoors for the Winter. Marjoram is also a wonderful healing herb; its warming, calming and muscle-relaxant properties are very healing to migraine/tension headaches, leg cramps, insomnia, back spasms, colic and stress-related conditions.

OREGANO: I love Italian food, and most recipes include a generous amount of this herb. It adds a hot, fresh and spicy aroma and flavor to sauces, dressings, marinades, etc. The plant itself looks quite similar to marjoram above, but typically larger leaves and a heartier plant., yet it is best to also bring this plant indoors for the Winter months. Oregano oil used in aromatherapy is a very HOT oil, and must be diluted to a 3-10% solution before applying to the skin; it is one of the most anti-bacterial and anti-septic plants/oils available, making it great as a gargle for a sore throat, wound dressing, preservative in infusions/creams/etc.

BASIL: This favorite plant comes in so many wonderful varieties – genovese, globe, lemon, cinnamon, sacred, red rubin, holy. I grow this yummy herb all year long – outdoors in pots in my vegetable garden, and indoors in my AeroGardens thru the Winter. Pesto (see recipe section) is one of my favorite garden treats. Basil loves a good dose of morning sun and shade or partial

shade in the afternoons; pinch off blooms as soon as they appear, and harvest leaves often; this way, you will have a steady and prolific supply of basil thru the garden season. Basil is also a special medicinal herb; it offers a cooling and calming effect for inflammatory processes, nervous conditions, depression, etc. It is also gently uplifting, restorative and tonic to the kidneys and adrenal glands. The flowers also attract many pollinators (mason bees, honey bees) to the garden.

FENNEL: What a beautiful and unusual-looking plant this is, adding a unique texture and visual interest to your garden. Fennel leaves are a nice addition to soups and salad dressings; the bulb of fennel is very yummy when roasted with other root vegetables coated with an olive oil and garlic rub. The seeds of fennel are a very important medicinal herb; I discovered this miracle back in 1976 when I was breast-feeding my son, I drank 12-16 ounces of fennel seed tea twice per day. This greatly increased my milk production (I nursed 2 extra children whose mothers' milk had dried up, and I saved/donated milk for the "boy in the bubble"). The anti-colic and flatulence-releasing qualities of this herb came thru my milk, thus greatly relieving my son's colic symptoms.

CILANTRO: Mexican food just wouldn't be the same without this favorite culinary herb. I often add some coriander leaves into my basil mix in my favorite pesto recipe. The tender, flat with serrated edge leaves add a fresh and interesting visual to the vegetable garden. This herb also loves morning or evening sun; although it will grow in full sun, the leaves tend to become tough. Cilantro is an excellent lipolytic herb, which burns up lipids and cholesterol while also stimulating the circulation and cardiac function to flush it out of the body.

ROSEMARY: This beautiful spikey-leaved plant makes a wonderful addition to your garden. Over time, some varieties grow into a shrub, so plant it where it will have plenty of room to grow; in our zone 4-5 area, it is best to plant it near the house or garden shed, where it will get plenty of sunshine and be somewhat protected. Just brushing up against this plant will give off such a pungent aroma. I like to harvest a lot of the leaves in late summer and grind them up in my Vita-Mixer to use all Winter in soups, marinades, salad dressing, marinara sauce, meat rubs, etc. I keep the leaves whole for use in herbal infusions, due to its anti-microbial, anti-oxidant, astringent, diaphoretic (makes you sweat) and tonic qualities. An herbal infusion of rosemary makes an excellent scalp treatment for balding, as it regulates the sebaceous glands, stimulates the scalp and follicles, and promotes hair growth. Rosemary also provides excellent preservative qualities in tinctures, creams and lip balms. **WARNING:** Rosemary in high doses or prolonged use has been shown to be hypertensive (raising the blood pressure).

See recipes on next page:

RECIPES

PESTO: This is such an easy and flavorful treat. It is basically made from any green, any nut, any vegetable oil and any cheese; play around with various combinations to discover your favorite. I make some type of pesto nearly every week, depending upon what fresh herbs/greens I have available. In early Spring, I will make a dandelion green and basil pesto, with pine nuts or almonds, extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) and parmesan or asiago cheese. Later in the season, I will add cilantro or arugula to the basil; sometimes, I use goat chevre and make a creamy pesto.

1 cup of organic EVOO	1 1/2 cups of fresh basil (or other herbal leaves)
The juice of one lemon or two limes	1/4 cup of pine nuts (or other nuts)
1/4 cup of parmesan cheese (or other cheese)	1 teaspoon of organic tamari sauce

Place liquid ingredients in a blender/food processor; add greens and process slightly. Add nuts and process to desired consistency. Stir in cheese (if grated, or add with nuts to process). ENJOY !

ITALIAN SALAD DRESSING/MARINADE: When you have a garden full of Italian herbs, you just have to use them fresh like this. This is yummy on lettuce salads, steamed greens, as a meat marinade/sauce, brushed on toasted bread, etc. Add parmesan, ricotta, chevre, etc. to make a spread that is fantastic as a condiment for an Italian meat sandwich or grilled chicken sandwich.

1 cup of organic EVOO	1/2 cup of balsamic (or red wine) vinegar
the juice of one lemon or two limes	3-10 cloves of fresh garlic (to taste)
1 cup of any combination of (fresh leaves off the stem) oregano, thyme, marjoram, basil, rosemary	
3-5 reconstituted sun-dried tomatoes, sliced into small pieces	
1 teaspoon of organic tamari/soy sauce OR 1/2 teaspoon of salt	

Place all ingredients in a blender/food processor and mix to desired consistency.