



Culinary Herbs

Sharon Bale and Mary Witt

Using herbs to flavor food used to interest only the most discriminating gourmet. Now, whether people use them for

health reasons or want to have their average meal taste a little special, herbs are increasing in popularity.

Herbs are generally easy to grow, and as a group, they have few pest or disease problems. Many can be harvested and stored for use during the winter, and some may even tolerate the reduced light intensity indoors to provide a fresh source of flavor during the winter.

Many herbs are annuals and complete their life cycle during one growing season. Some are biennials and require two seasons of growth to mature. Depending on what part of the plant is desired, many biennial herbs can be useful for two years. Others are tender perennials and must be brought indoors when cold weather approaches. Perennial herbs are not only desirable for their culinary uses but can often be an attractive addition to the landscape.

Harvesting, Drying, and Storing

Harvesting

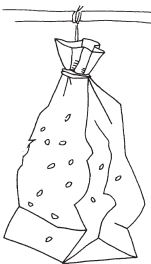
Harvest your herbs on a dry, sunny morning after the dew has dried. Rinse to remove dust and soil, and pat dry on paper towels.

Harvest herbs for drying when they contain maximum amounts of essential oils:

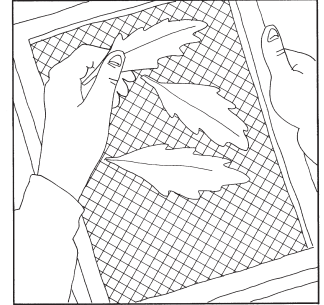
- Leafy herbs—just before buds open;
- Seed herbs—when seeds change from green to brown;
- Herb flowers just before full flowering.

Drying

To dry herbs, hang them in bunches after they have been washed thoroughly. Cover the bunches with paper bags to prevent dust from accumulating on the plants during drying. Do not hang bunches in the sun since doing so spoils color and dissipates oils. Once herbs are dry and brittle, take down the bundles, and strip leaves from the stems.



Short-stemmed herbs, seeds, and flowers may be more conveniently dried by spreading them on a drying screen. Use house window screens propped off the ground to allow for good air circulation on all sides. Dried herbs can be ground with a mortar and pestle.



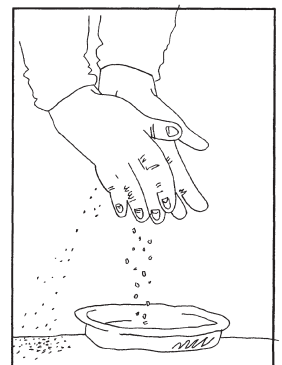
Storing

Store herbs in airtight containers in a cool, dry location. Keep glass jars out of the sun to avoid bleaching colors of the herbs. Brown-colored jars are ideal for storing dried herbs. If condensation appears, remove herbs, and dry them a little longer.

Many leafy herbs can also be frozen for future use. After washing the herbs, pat them dry, remove leaves, chop them into desired sizes, and put them in small plastic sandwich bags or plastic freezer boxes. If you have favorite herb blends, you may want to freeze them together rather than separately. Chives, dill, and fennel usually are better frozen rather than dried. If herbs are to be frozen for more than two months, they should be blanched in boiling water for 45 seconds before being frozen. Blanched, frozen herbs will keep about six months.

Harvesting seeds can be disappointing if you let the seeds completely ripen on the plants. Once seeds are ripe, they tend to fall off very easily, and harvesting at this time is almost impossible. Blooms can be cut just as the seeds ripen and stored in a paper bag. Doing so ensures that the maximum number of seeds can be harvested.

To harvest seeds, hang a bag of seed heads in a dry place for a week. Then rub the heads between your hands. A breeze will help blow the chaff aside while seeds fall into the bowl.





Using Herbs in Cooking

Herb Butters

Herb butters can be used to season or sauté vegetables and meats. They can also be used with any type of bread. Although sweet butter is most desirable, margarine can be substituted, but it does not absorb the flavor of the herbs as well as butter. Just about any herb can be used to make herb butter; it is just a matter of individual taste.

Combine about 1 tablespoon of minced fresh herb with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup softened butter. Allow to stand at room temperature for two hours so herbs can permeate butter.

Store in small tightly covered jars, wrap in plastic or foil, or shape in butter molds and then refrigerate. Most herb butters can be kept in the refrigerator for up to a month or frozen for about three months.

Herb Teas

Herb tea is made either of all herbs or part herbs and black tea. The first introduction to herb tea is perhaps best as a blend. Herb teas are always light-colored, most often amber, but this color does not indicate that their flavor is too weak. Do not steep them longer because all herb teas are light amber or green. If you want to use sweetener, honey gives the best flavor.

Use about 1 teaspoon of dried herbs for 2 cups of water. Use a teapot glazed inside so that tannins and flavors do not collect in the pot.

Some of the herbs and herb combinations used for tea are:

- lemon verbena and borage
- anise, chamomile, and costmary
- marjoram, anise, and lemon verbena
- lemongrass, rosemary, and thyme
- basil, lemon verbena, lemongrass, and lemon thyme.

Herb teas can be frozen in ice cube trays and used to chill other beverages.



Herbs in Oil

Olive oil, peanut oil, or any type of vegetable oil can be flavored with herbs. Use approximately 1 teaspoon of the desired herb for each cup of oil. Gently heat the oil until it is warm. Add herbs, and let the oil cool. Then store in an airtight container. Herb oils can be used to sauté and in salad dressings and marinades.

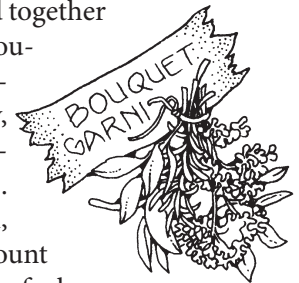
Some possibilities include basil, tarragon, garlic, and thyme.

Herb Salts

Use noniodized table salt and herb leaves (either combination or individual herbs). Pat a layer of salt on a cookie sheet, press on the leaves, followed by salt. Put in a 300° oven for 10 minutes. Take the sheet out of the oven, break up salt with a wooden spoon, and put the sheet back in the oven for 10 more minutes. Cool, sift, and bottle.

Bouquet Garni

Aromatic herbs or plants tied together into a little bunch make up a “bouquet garni.” Adjust the proportion of these plants—parsley, thyme, and bay leaf—depending on the nature of the dish. Bouquets garnis can be small, medium, or large. Take into account the strength of thyme and bay leaf when you decide the bouquet’s composition.



Bouquets of aromatic herbs for certain kinds of foods are made of basil, celery, chervil, tarragon, burnet, rosemary, savory, and other herbs of your choice. Remove the bouquet from stews and sauces before serving.

Soup Bags

Materials used are dried whole-leaf herbs and whole spices. These are tied into a square of cheesecloth or lightweight muslin and simmered during the last half hour in the stew or soup pot. Each bag contains about 1 tablespoon of herbs. Use one bag per quart of broth.

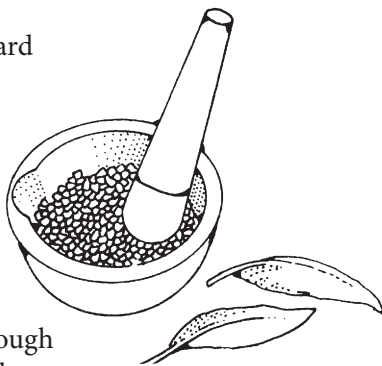
Recipes

Herb Mustards

4 different mustards

- 8 tablespoons dry mustard
- 8 tablespoons flour
- 4 tablespoons salt
- 9 teaspoons sugar
- Minced herbs
- Garlic vinegar

Either grind in a mortar, or buy herbs ground. Mix and add enough vinegar to make a smooth paste. Divide into quarters.



To each quarter, add one of the following:

- 1 tablespoon horseradish
- 1 tablespoon tarragon and parsley
- 1 tablespoon rosemary or thyme, dash of lovage
- 1 tablespoon sage and marjoram.

Store in jars and refrigerate.

Herb Vinegar

Depending on the type of vinegar used, different herbs will yield appealing blends. With white vinegar, try chives, tarragon, mint, or salad burnet. With apple cider vinegar, try an herb blend or mint, basil, or garlic. For wine vinegar, use a basil and garlic mix.

Crush or bruise three handfuls of fresh herbs for each half gallon of vinegar. Put the vinegar in a pot on the stove. Heat thoroughly, but do not boil. Pour hot vinegar over herbs in a storage jar or bottle, and cover tightly. Shake often. Store for four to six weeks. Strain into smaller bottles, discarding herbs. Cap and store until needed.

Candied Flowers

The following is a simple method to candy flowers or herb foliage.

Sugar Syrup

- Tweezers
- Fresh petals or herb foliage, well washed and dried
- Granulated sugar

Make a sugar syrup using 1 cup sugar and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water. Boil the mixture until it spins a thread. Cool to room temperature. Using tweezers, dip the flowers or foliage into the syrup and shake off excess. Then dip in fine granulated sugar. Place on waxed paper until dry. Some possibilities: roses, violets, borage bloom, mint leaves.

Pesto

For pasta, rice, fish, and vegetables, or in soup.

- 1 cup fresh basil leaves
- 3 tablespoons pine nuts or walnuts
- 3 tablespoons Parmesan cheese
- 2 to 3 cloves of garlic

Pureé in a food processor, adding enough olive oil to make a smooth paste. Store in closed containers in the refrigerator or freeze.

Fines Herbs

For omelets and scrambled eggs; butter sauces; vegetables; meat, poultry, and fish sauces. Yields 1 cup.

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dried parsley flakes
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup leaf chervil
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup freeze-dried chives
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup leaf tarragon

Combine all ingredients. Keep in tightly closed containers.

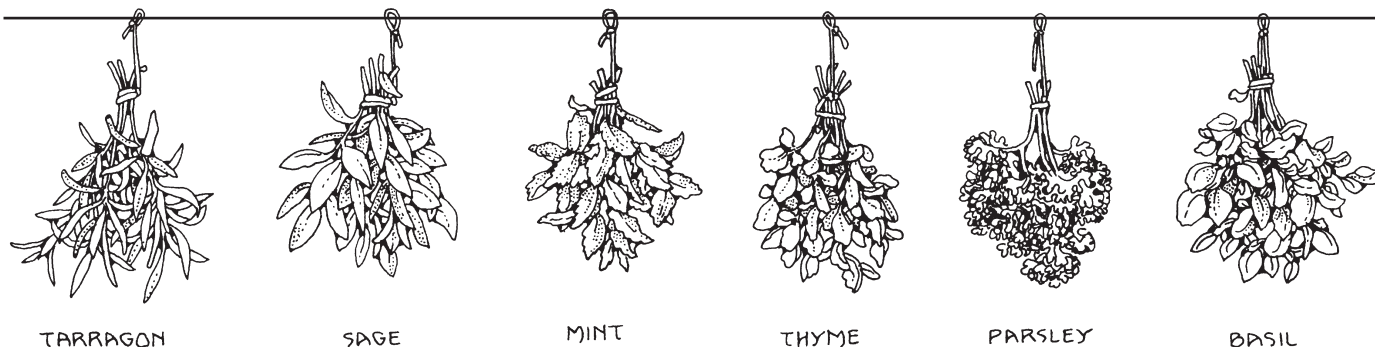
Italian Herbs

For meatballs, salad dressings, tomato sauce, eggplant dishes, sautéed chicken, and veal. Yields 1 cup.

- 3 tablespoons leaf oregano
- 3 tablespoons leaf marjoram
- 1 tablespoon leaf thyme
- 3 tablespoons leaf savory
- 3 tablespoons leaf basil
- 2 tablespoons leaf rosemary, crumbled
- 1 tablespoon leaf sage

Combine all ingredients. Keep in tightly closed containers.





Explanation of Terms

In this publication, some of the most common and some not so common culinary herbs are listed in alphabetical order according to their common name. The following is an explanation of the codes used in the table on the following page.

Hardiness (H)

A indicates an annual herb. Seed is generally sown in spring, and the herb is harvested later in the growing season.

H-A designates a hardy annual. Hardy annuals self-sow. Plants may not survive the cold winter, but the seed is quite hardy. These plants can become a pest if allowed to reseed. Frequent harvesting of plants before blooms are allowed to set seed can reduce this problem.

P is for perennial herbs. In most cases, perennial herbs can be long-lived additions to the garden or landscape.

T-P means a tender perennial. Farther south the plants may be quite hardy, but in Kentucky, they must have protection. Some of these plants may overwinter with a heavy layer of mulch, but most must be brought indoors to survival.

B is for biennial. Many herbs that are favored for their seeds are biennials. Since blooms are generally not produced until the second season, planting each year is necessary to have a source of seeds.

Uses

It is rarely possible to list all a herb's uses. Many uses are mentioned, but a favorite cookbook or magazine may supply more.

Exposure (Exp)

Most herbs do best in full sun. Exposure to bright sunlight increases essential oil concentration and produces a higher-quality product. Herbs that tolerate less light are indicated by "P-Sh" (partial shade).

Height

This indicates the plant height to expect. Soil conditions, weather, fertilization, exposure, etc., can often affect the plant's ultimate height.

Propagation (Prop)

Since a large number of plants are generally not needed, the simplest way to establish an herb garden is to buy plants from a local garden center. If you need larger numbers of plants, many herbs are easy to start from seed. You usually do so indoors early in the spring so that you can take transplants to the garden after danger of frost has passed. Some herbs like dill and fennel have a taproot, so sowing them directly where they are to grow is a must. Even some perennial herbs can be started from seed, but it often takes much longer to grow a plant that can be harvested.

Division of perennial herbs from a friend's garden can be another source of plants. You can usually make a division in spring or fall. Cuttings are another possible source, although it takes much longer to get a sizable plant.

Culinary Herbs (Listed Alphabetically by Name)

Name	Hardiness	Uses	Exp	Height	Prop	Harvest	Storage	Comments
Anise <i>Pimpinella anisum</i>	A	Licorice-flavored seeds used to flavor cookies and cakes. Foliage can be used to flavor salads and as a tea.	S	20-24"	Seed	Harvest when seed heads turn yellow. Harvest foliage before it yellows.	Dried	May require staking because the stems are weak. Plants are difficult to transplant.
Beebalm, Bergamot <i>Monarda didyma</i>	P	Foliage used to make tea.	S	3'	Division or cuttings	Harvest foliage just before flowers open.	Dried	Named cultivars do not come true from seed. The blooms attract bees. Plants may need division in spring to rejuvenate the clump.
Borage <i>Borago officinalis</i>	H-A	Cucumber-flavored foliage is used in salads and cold drinks or cooked as a vegetable. The blue flowers can be candied or used fresh in salads.	S	12-24"	Seed, in spring or fall	Harvest foliage and flowers as needed.	Best used fresh	Vigorous; may self-sow readily. Considered a bee plant.
Calendula <i>Calendula officinalis</i>	A	Fresh or dried flower petals are used to flavor soups and stews or as a food coloring.	S	12-14"	Seed indoors in March	Pick blooms just before they reach their peak	Dried	Calendula is a cool-season annual. Plant in spring and fall. Petals have been used as an inexpensive replacement for saffron.
Caraway <i>Carum carvi</i>	B	Foliage is used in soups and salads. Seeds used in tea, rye bread, cheese, and sauerkraut.	S	24-36"	Seed in spring or fall	Seed can be harvested the second year.	Dried	A biennial that produces a basal rosette of foliage the first year and blooms the second. Plant annually for a continuous supply.
Chervil <i>Anthriscus cerefolium</i>	H-A	Parsley-flavored foliage is used in many dishes, especially French cuisine, egg dishes, fish, and sauces.	S P-Sh	12-24"	Seed in early spring or late summer		Dried or frozen	Young foliage is the best. Plain and curly types of foliage. Remove blooms to promote better foliage. Difficult to transplant. Best crop in fall and spring.
Chives <i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>	P	Foliage is used for mild onion flavor, especially in salads, potatoes, and vegetables.	S	8-12"	Seed or division	Cut clumps at the base of the plant. Harvest before bloom.	Dried or frozen	Round hollow leaves are a favorite of cooks. Attractive enough to use as an edging plant. Rose purple blooms can be used as a cut flower. Divide plants every 3-4 years.
Coriander, Cilantro <i>Coriandrum sativum</i>	H-A	The seed is valued for its spicy flavor and is used in breads, gingerbread, cookies, and pickling spices. The foliage is used to flavor Mexican and southwestern dishes. The seed and foliage do not have the same flavor.	S	12-24"	Seed in May or fall	Harvest foliage when plants are 6" tall. Harvest seed when the fruits turn light brown.	Dried	The odor emitted from the immature seed is very unpleasant but becomes more pleasant as they dry. Few seed are produced per plant. A large number of plants are needed to harvest a significant amount of seed.
Dill <i>Anethum graveolens</i>	H-A	Foliage and seeds are used to flavor pickles, vinegars, dips, and sauces.	S	24-36"	Seed, spring or fall	Harvest foliage anytime; harvest seed just as they ripen and turn beige-brown.	Dried or frozen	Dill is difficult to transplant. Is best sown directly. Will self-sow.

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Name	Hardiness	Uses	Exp	Height	Prop	Harvest	Storage	Comments
Fennel <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	P	Licorice-flavored seeds and foliage are used in salads and sauces for seafood. The seeds are used in bread and tea.	S	up to 5'	Seed	Harvest foliage anytime. Harvest seed just as they ripen.	Foliage best used fresh. Seed can be dried.	Difficult to transplant. Is best sown directly. May self-sow. May require staking.
Florence Fennel <i>Foeniculum vulgare dulce</i>	A	May also be called finocchio. This annual produces swollen stems that may be eaten as a vegetable. The foliage can be used in salads and sauces.	S	up to 2'	Seed	Harvest foliage anytime. Harvest stems when they ripen.	Foliage best used fresh.	Finocchio should not be allowed to flower if the stems are to be used as a vegetable. Bronze forms are available.
French Tarragon <i>Artemisia dracunculus sativus</i>	P	Fresh foliage is used to flavor meats, sauces, and vinegars.	S P-Sh	12-24"	Cuttings	Harvest foliage as needed and use fresh.	Store in vinegar	True French tarragon does not produce viable seed and does not retain its flavor when dried.
Garlic Chives <i>Allium tuberosum</i>	P	Foliage is used for mild garlic flavor, especially in salads, potatoes, and vegetables.	S	18-24"	Seed or division	Harvest foliage as needed. Cut foliage at the base of the plant.	Dried or frozen	White blooms are produced later in the season; excellent cut flowers.
Horehound <i>Marrubium vulgare</i>	P	Foliage is used for lemonade and tea and to make candy.	S	18-24"	Seed, division or cuttings	Harvest foliage at least three times during the growing season. Cut it back to within 3" of the ground.	Dried	Plants should be cut back before they bloom to avoid reseeding. This plant can become a weed; also a bee plant.
Hyssop <i>Hyssopus officinalis</i>	P	More commonly used for its fragrance. The foliage can be used in tea, salads, poultry stuffing, and chicken soup.	S P-Sh	12-24"	Seed or division in spring or fall	Harvest before the plants bloom.	Dried	Can be used as a dense evergreen hedge or edging plant when clipped. The blooms are blue, white, or pink in midsummer.
Lemon Balm <i>Melissa officinalis</i>	P	Foliage is used to flavor salads, drinks, soups, fish, and meats.	S	28-36"	Seed, division or cuttings	Harvest before bloom.	Dried	Cut back before bloom to promote young vigorous growth. Quickly becomes weedy. Invasive.
Lemon Verbena <i>Aloysia triphylla</i>	T-P	Foliage is used as a substitute for lemon in recipes.	S P-Sh	24-36"	Seed or root cuttings	Foliage harvested before flowering is most desirable.	Dried	Plants are tender perennials. Has a very strong lemon fragrance.
Lovage <i>Levisticum officinale</i>	P	Foliage and stems are used for celery-like flavor in many dishes. Seeds are used to flavor meats, salad dressings, sauces, pickling brine, and candies. Also used in vinegar.	S P-Sh	36-48"	Seed or division	Young foliage is best.	Dried	When the foliage matures, cut the plant back to promote new growth. May self-sow.
Mint <i>(various species)</i>	P	Foliage is used in teas, as a garnish, and in vinegar, jelly, and sauces.	S P-Sh	varied	Seed, division, or cuttings	Harvest foliage before bloom when the essential oil content is greatest.	Dried	Cut back frequently to avoid bloom and cross pollination. Many of the mints can be quite invasive. Most prefer a moist soil.

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Name	Hardiness	Uses	Exp	Height	Prop	Harvest	Storage	Comments
Nasturtium <i>Tropaeolum majus</i>	A	Foliage is used like watercress. Seeds and flower buds can be pickled. Blooms can be used as a garnish and in salads and punch.	S	8-10" or vine	Seed	Blooms and foliage can be harvested anytime.	Use fresh.	There are two growth habits. Some cultivars will vine up to 6', while other cultivars remain quite compact. Aphids can be a problem. Flowers are red, yellow, or orange. Foliage is saucer-shaped.
French Curly Parsley <i>Petroselinum crispum</i> Italian Parsley <i>Petroselinum neapolitanum</i>	B	Foliage is used as a garnish and to flavor foods.	S	12-18"	Seed	First-year growth is the most desirable.	Dried or frozen	Italian parsley has a stronger flavor. Parsley is rich in vitamins A and C and iron. Seed germination is very slow. Soak seeds in water for 24 hours before planting.
Roman Chamomile <i>Chamaemelum nobile</i>	P	The apple-scented blooms are used in teas.	S	12-14"	Seed or division in spring	Daisy-like blooms are harvested in mid-June.	Dried	Harvest blooms to maintain plant vigor. Can be an effective ground cover. Can be mowed.
Rosemary <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	T-P	Foliage is used in egg dishes, meat dishes, vinegars, salads, vegetables, stews, and teas.	S	up to 6'	Cuttings, division in spring or fall	Harvest anytime.	Dried, frozen, vinegar, or oil	There are prostrate forms. The fresh foliage is very strong and should be used sparingly. Removing the flowers helps maintain a compact habit.
Saffron <i>Crocus sativus</i>	P	The yellow stigmas of the fall crocus are used for seasoning and coloring.	S	6"	Corms in spring or fall	The white to lavender flowers appear in Aug. or Sept. The stigma is harvested then.	Dried	The plants may not be long-lived in the garden. Although the corms are inexpensive, they are often difficult to find. Since only one stigma is produced per plant, a large number of plants are needed to harvest a significant amount of saffron.
Sage <i>Salvia officinalis</i>	P	Foliage is used to flavor meats, sausage, and stuffings.	S	24-36"	Seed or cuttings	Foliage can be harvested anytime.	Dried	Divide mature plants every four to five years. Best to propagate from cuttings. There are many different types of sage available, some more ornamental than culinary. The common sage is probably best for culinary use.
Sweet Basil <i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	A	Frequently used in soups, vegetables, and tomato dishes.	S	24-36"	Seed	Harvest the foliage before the plants bloom.	Dried or frozen	Ornamental basil such as 'Purple Ruffles' and 'Dark Opal' can be used. 'Spicy Globe' has very small foliage and is not as desirable. Remove flower stalks to promote foliage growth.
Sweet Bay <i>Laurus nobilis</i>	T-P	Foliage is used in bouquet garni and to flavor soups, stews, and tomato sauces.	S P-Sh	3-10'	Cuttings	Harvest the foliage anytime.	Dried	Grow in a container, and bring it indoors at the first hint of frost.

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Name	Hardiness	Uses	Exp	Height	Prop	Harvest	Storage	Comments
Sweet Marjoram <i>Origanum majorana</i>	P	Foliage is used in meat, vegetable, and tomato dishes and in soups and stews. Used like oregano.	S	12-20"	Seed or cuttings	Harvest when ball-like tips appear at the ends of the stems.	Dried	Cut the plant back to the ground when flowers bloom to stimulate new growth.
Salad Burnet <i>Poterium sanguisorba</i>	P	Foliage has a cucumber flavor. Used in salads, butters, and cold drinks and as a garnish.	S	12"	Seed or division	Young foliage is the most desirable.	Use fresh	To promote fresh growth, snip off old foliage and flower stalks. Divide in spring.
Scented Geranium <i>Pelargonium (various species)</i>	A	Foliage is used to flavor desserts, preserves, and other foods.	S	12-34"	Cuttings	Oils are strongest when the leaf is rubbed or exposed to hot direct sun.	Fresh is best	Some of the types available are lemon, rose, apple, and peppermint. They can also be used in potpourri.
Summer Savory <i>Satureja hortensis</i>	A	Foliage is used to flavor meats, vegetables, salads, soups, stews, egg dishes, beans, vegetables, herb butters, and vinegars.	S	18"	Seed	Flavor is best before the flowers bloom.	Dried	Succession planting is advisable every two to three weeks to ensure a continuous supply. Staking may be necessary. Keep well watered.
Winter Savory <i>Satureja montana</i>	P	Foliage flavor is similar to summer savory but sharper.	S	10"	Seed, cuttings, or division	Used in meats, soups, and vegetables. Foliage can be harvested anytime.	Dried	Each spring, cut the plants back almost to soil level. Trim foliage throughout the season to promote compact growth. Can harvest fresh all winter.