

# Growing Culinary Herbs in Central NC



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learn more online!**

<http://go.ncsu.edu/herb-resources>



# Growing Culinary Herbs

- **Herb growing basics**
  - In containers
  - In raised beds
- **Tips for specific herbs**
  - Annual herbs
  - Perennial herbs
- **Tips from Pat Weisbrodt**, Extension Master Gardener



**Chives** – Leaves and blossoms are edible!

# Defining Culinary Herbs

- Plants used fresh or dried to enhance flavor of foods/beverages
- Typically leaves are harvested part
- Can be:
  - **Annuals** – live only one season; replanted each year
  - **Perennials** – live multiple years; may go dormant in winter but return from the roots in spring
  - **Shrubs** – woody plants that live many years



# Growing Culinary Herbs

## The good news:

**Culinary herbs are easy to grow!**

- Have few pest problems
- Rarely bothered by deer or rabbits
- Require little care
- A little goes a long way!



# Growing Culinary Herbs

## The bad news:

- Most herbs need full sun (6 hrs+/day) and good drainage
- This is a challenge for shady yards and heavy clay soil



# Growing Culinary Herbs

## The good news:

**Culinary herbs thrive in containers!**

- Easily grown on a patio/deck or other sunny area
- Also thrive in raised beds if you choose the right location



# The Right Location

## Sunny and well drained!

- **Direct sun at least 6-8 hours/day**
  - Less sun = less flavor
  - Shade grown herbs have more disease problems
- **No standing water after rainfall**
  - Herbs grown in poorly drained soils quickly drown or develop root rot





# Solution: Containers

## Herbs thrive in containers!

- Minimum 8" deep
- Drainage holes in bottom
- Clay containers "breathe"
- Fill with purchased potting mix
  - Mix of peat moss, ground bark, perlite, vermiculite --- no fertilizer



# Containers

Volume and drainage  
most important  
considerations



# Containers

**Best to grow 1 variety per pot unless growing in large containers**

- Easier to manage watering
- More vigorous herbs with take over less vigorous varieties
- Some are annuals that have to be replanted each season



Strawberry pots can be difficult to water

# Watering Containers

- Allow containers to dry out between watering
- Then water thoroughly – **until water drips out of the bottom of the container**
- **Never leave sitting in saucer of water**

Overwatered Rosemary



# Providing Nutrients

- Many herbs prefer lower nutrient levels - Avoid potting soils that contain fertilizers
- Instead, provide nutrients with slow release or organic fertilizer
- Avoid liquid fertilizers on perennial herbs



Time Release



Organic



Liquid

# Option 2: Raised Beds

- **At least 8" deep**
- **4' wide** or less
- **Length** – depends on material used and space available
- Fill with **mix** of soil and compost (50/50)
- Can mulch with pea gravel or ground pine bark



# Raised Beds



# Get Creative!

But keep  
maintenance  
in mind!





# Herb Flowers

## Herb flowers are edible!

- Herb flowers are favorites of many pollinators and beneficial insects
- **Flowering reduces leaf production and flavor**
  - remove flowers if more leaves needed
- Must allow flowers to mature if desire seed production



Oregano



Cilantro

# Harvesting Herbs

- **Best time:**
  - Early morning after dew dries
  - Just before blooms open
- For most herbs harvest leaves at tips (2"-3")
- Pinch or cut just above a node (where new leaves are sprouting)



# Freezing Herbs

- Rinse and chop
- Freeze in ice trays with water
- Alternative: spread on cookie sheets
- Store in freezer bags
- Lose color but retain flavor



# Drying Herbs

- Air Dry
- Dehydrator
- Microwave
- Oven dry



More tips from Pat Weisbrodt!

# Culinary Herbs for Central NC

To grow successfully,  
need to know:

## Life Cycle

- Annual- cool or warm season
- Perennial

## Preferred Conditions

- Sun or Shade
- Soil Drainage
- Fertility



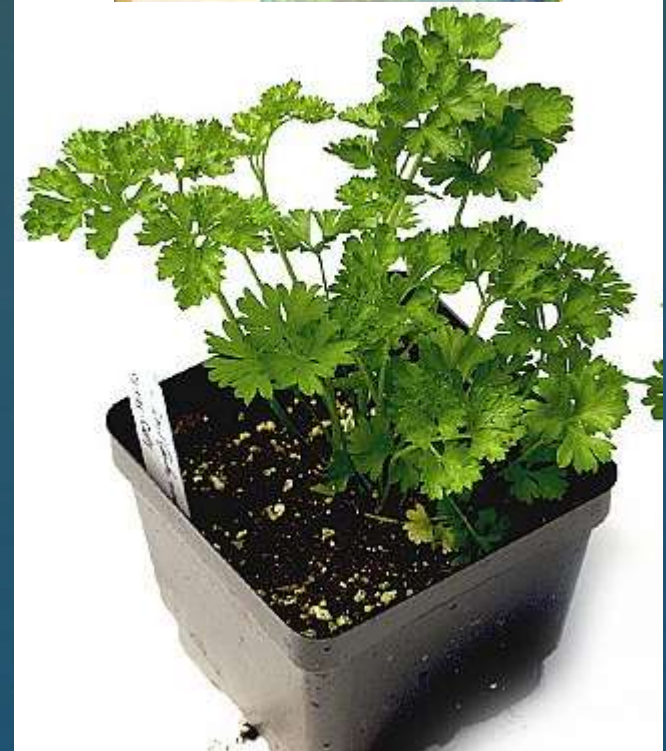
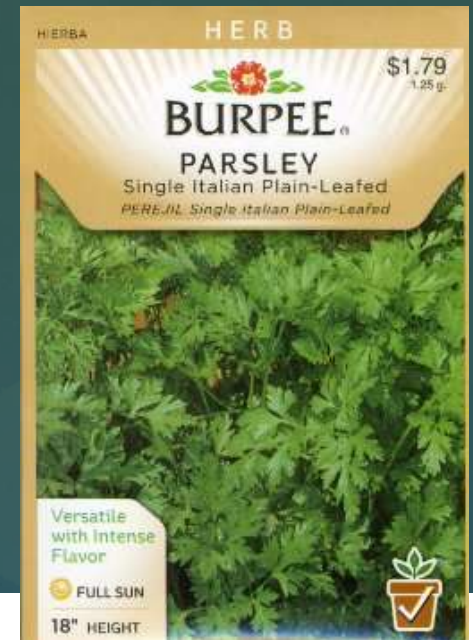
# Annual Herbs

Can be grown from seed or transplants

- Seed trickier but cheaper
- Good if need lots of plants

## When to plant:

- **Cool Season** =  
March/April and Sept.
- **Warm Season** = mid-  
April - August



# Basil

## *Ocimum basilicum*

- Warm Season Grower
  - Very sensitive to frost
- Easy from seed; Easy to root from cuttings
  - Sow new batch every 3-4 weeks
- Prevent drought stress
- Cut off flowers to keep up leaf production
- Genovese preferred culinary type



# Basil Varieties

Greek Columnar -  
very upright, 4' tall;  
does not bloom



'Purple Ruffles' - purple leaf



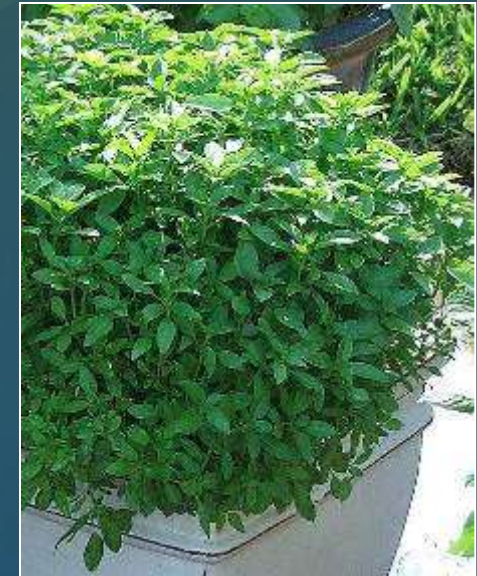
Cinnamon or Mexican  
Basil



Thai Basil, 'Siam Queen'  
- compact 12"



'Italian Large Leaf' for pesto



'Spicy Globe' -  
Small leaves on  
compact plants



# Other Warm Season Annuals



## Cuban Oregano

*Plectranthus amboinicus*

Strongly fragrant, large fleshy leaves. Grown as a houseplant or ornamental. Sun to pt. shade, well drained, moist soil. Overwinter indoors

## Stevia

*Stevia rebaudiana*

Heat loving, drought tolerant annual (perennial in zone 9). Sun, well drained soil. Add leaves to tea for a natural sweetener



# Cool Season Annual Herbs

- Plant Aug-Sept for fall crop; Feb-March for spring
- **Die out in heat of summer**
- Can grow in winter in sunny spot with minimal heat
- **If room, allow to bloom in summer** – blooms attract beneficial insects and sow the fall crop!



# Bolting

Some plants  
respond to  
daylength

Lengthening  
days trigger  
reproductive  
growth  
(flowering)

Cool season  
herbs bolt  
rapidly in  
summer



*www.GrowingTheHomeGarden.com*

**Cilantro in summer**

# Parsley

- Soak seed for 6-8 hrs before sowing
- Survives most winters
- Dies out mid summer after flowering
- Sun – pt. shade, moist, well drained soil

Curly Parsley

Italian Flat Leaf



# Caterpillars

- Black swallowtail larva feed on all members of parsley/carrot family
- Can handpick – grow perennial fennel or extra parsley as 'nursery' crop
- Or spray with B.t, spinosad, or neem oil



# Parsleyworms, aka Black Swallowtails

Egg



Young  
Caterpillars



Caterpillars



Will also eat:  
Fennel, Dill,  
Queen Anne's  
Lace, Carrot,

Adult Male



Chrysalis



Adult Female



# Annual Parsley Relatives



## Dill

*Anethum graveolens*

Not as cold tolerant as parsley, plant early fall and early spring.



## Cilantro, Coriander

*Coriandrum sativum*

Fall and early spring for foliage - successive sowings. Let mature for seed.

# More Parsley Relatives

- Caraway
- Chervil
- Cumin

Grown similar to  
dill/cilantro

Typically grown from  
seed – rarely find  
plants for sale





# Culinary Herbs for Central NC: **PERENNIALS**



# Perennial Herbs

- Most will live for several years if happy
- Most are **sensitive to overwatering**
- Typically purchased as plants
- Best time to plant outdoors: March – October
- Require little fertilizer



Check out farmers markets and local nurseries for herb plants

# Mediterranean Herbs

- Many popular perennial culinary herbs – Rosemary, Sage, Thyme, Oregano
- **Require full sun, excellent drainage**
- Drought tolerant
- Irrigation and fertilizer lead to disease problems and reduce flavor
- **Expect some deaths during August!**



# Oregano



## Greek Oregano

*Origanum vulgare*  
subspecies *hirtum*

Preferred Culinary



## Common Oregano

*Origanum vulgare*

Flowers in summer, less  
flavorful



## Sweet Marjorum

*Origanum marjorana*

Tricky to grow

## Italian Oregano

*O. marjorana* x *O.*  
*vulgare*

Easier to grow

# Sage

*Salvia officinalis*

‘Purpurascens’



‘Tricolor’



‘Icterina’



‘Berggarten’

Favorite  
culinary, large  
leaves.

# Common Thyme

## *Thymus vulgaris*



Low growing, sensitive  
to summer moisture

Lavender blooms in  
early summer



## Lemon Thyme

*Thymus x citriodorus*

Lower growing with softer stems.  
Several gold leaved and variegated  
varieties are available.

# Lavenders



**English Lavender**

*Lavandula angustifolia*

- not heat tolerant



**Spanish Lavender**

*Lavandula stoechas*

Most long lived lavender in NC



**Lavandin**

*Lavandula x intermedia*

'Grosso' does okay



**French Lavender**

*Lavandula dentata* - not cold hardy

# Rosemary

## *Rosmarinus officinalis*

- Tough, evergreen shrub
- Sun, good drainage
- Drought tolerant
- Deer resistant
- Ornamental and culinary
  - upright and trailing forms available
- Upright varieties typically reach 3'-4' tall and wide or more!





# Bay

## *Laurus nobilis*

- Evergreen shrub that is winter hardy in the piedmont
- Expect some cold damage in harsh winters
- Requires sun and well drained soil
- Grows 4'-6' or taller!



# Other Perennial Herbs



**Chives**

*Allium schoenoprasum*

Extremely easy from seed or division. Long lived, self seed. Sun well drained soil, drought tolerant.



**Garlic  
Chives**

*Allium tuberosum*

Taller than chives, same requirements. Self seeds prolifically.



# Fennel

*Foeniculum vulgare*

- Perennial
- Sun – light shade, moist to dry soils
- **3'-5' tall**, yellow flowers in summer – attracts beneficials
- Florence Fennel is related but different, grow as a summer annual



# Mints

All spread extremely vigorously!!



## Spearmint

*Mentha spicata*

Sun to part shade,  
moist to average  
soil.



## Peppermint

*Mentha piperita*

Grow in containers  
above ground.



## Pineapple Mint

*Mentha suaveolens*  
'Variegata'



## Apple Mint

*Mentha suaveolens*

# Tarragon

## French Tarragon

*Artemisia dracunculus* var. *sativa*

- True culinary tarragon
- Struggles in heat and humidity – afternoon shade helps

## Russian Tarragon

*Artemisia dracunculoides*

- Edible tarragon relative but little flavor
- Larger, more heat tolerant plant



# Mexican Mint Marigold

- *Tagetes lucida*
- A perennial marigold!
- Marginally hardy in zone 7
- Tarragon substitute (leaves)
- Yellow flowers in fall, 3' x 2'
- Sun, well drained soil
- More heat tolerant than French Tarragon



# Other Perennial Herbs



## Lemon Balm

*Melissa officinalis*

Very easy - sun to part shade, well drained soil. Easy from seed or cuttings.

## Salad Burnet

*Poterium sanguisorba*

Sun to light shade, well drained soil. Leaves have cucumber flavor - best in spring and fall.



## Horseradish

*Armoracia rusticana*

Sun, rich, moist soil. Harvest roots by digging into clump rather than digging whole clump up.

# Non Hardy Perennial Herbs

Grow outside in summer, bring inside for winter



**Lemongrass**

*Cymbopogon  
flexuosus*



**Lemon  
Verbena**

*Aloysia triphylla*



**Culinary  
Ginger**

*Zingiber officinale*



# Using and Preserving Culinary Herbs

**Tips from Pat Weisbrodt,  
Chatham Extension Master  
Gardener Volunteer**

# Fresh herbs are generally best for cooking

Exceptions:

- **Oregano** - better flavor from dried
- If you find oregano too strong, try **marjoram**



**If using dried herbs  
instead of fresh,**  
use half of the amount called  
for in the recipe



**Add dried herbs** at the beginning of cooking and fresh near the end of cooking



# Most herbs dry well in a dehydrator, 90°-125°

Exceptions:

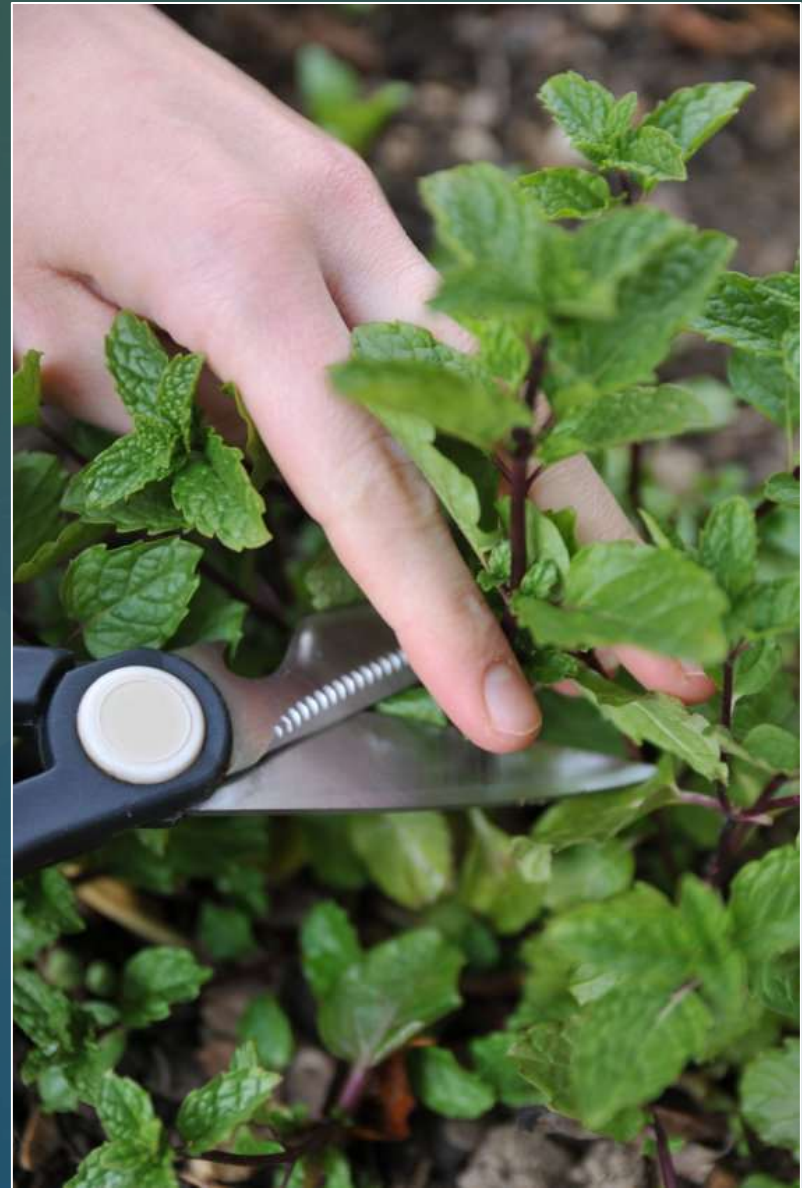
- **Dill Seed**
- **Garlic**
- **Lavender**
- **Rosemary**

Tie in bundles



**Pick herbs in  
the morning**  
before heat of  
the day

**Rinse in cold  
water** to  
remove bugs,  
dirt, and debris



**Place in a salad spinner to  
remove excess water**

Lay leaves  
or springs  
on trays of  
dehydrator,  
with space  
in between



# Crush herbs when you are using them

- not when packing in jars for storage
- Use clean jars with tight lids





# Use Virgin Olive Oil . . .

Extra virgin olive oil may overwhelm the flavor of the herbs



**If you find pesto too strong . . .**

try using  $\frac{1}{2}$  flat leaf (Italian) parsley  
and  $\frac{1}{2}$  basil for  
your recipe



**Infused oils** will become rancid

If adding herbs to oils, **use within a few weeks**



# Infused vinegars last a long time

- Place herbs in vinegar
- Place in a **dark cupboard** for six weeks
- Strain vinegar and place in glass container



# Thanks to Country Farm & Home

101 S. Small St., Pittsboro,  
for donating our door prize!



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- Review slides
- Find fact sheets on growing and using herbs

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- <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu>

**In Chatham County,**

- 919-542-8202
- charlotte\_glen@ncsu.edu

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