



Our guide to growing (and using) indoor herbs



TAKE YOUR PICK

The easiest way to cheer up your kitchen in the middle of winter? Grow herbs indoors. With a few fresh sprigs at your fingertips, you can add instant flavor to everything from smoothies to soups. Most herbs do well in pots, but not all thrive inside. Here, we offer expert advice to ensure you'll have a steady supply of five hardy favorites all season long.

BAY

Bay grows into a huge shrub in warmer climates, but this evergreen happily resides in pots, often trimmed into an attractive topiary shape. If you find the taste of fresh bay to be bitter, let the leaves dry for a week to 10 days before using (they should snap in half easily). To harvest, use scissors to clip off sets of the glossy, deep-green leaves.

use it

To make an aromatic bay-infused cream, place 5 fresh or dried bay leaves in heavy cream or coconut milk, and heat until the liquid is hot but not boiling. Remove from the stove, steep 10 minutes, then strain out the leaves, and swirl a spoonful into chilies, soups, and stews.

MINT

In the garden, mint tends to take over, making it the perfect candidate for growing in a pot. If you have room for only one container of mint, choose spearmint—its flavor blends well in both sweet and savory dishes. To encourage new growth when harvesting, snip off sprigs right above a pair of leaves, leaving at least half the length of each stem below.

use it

Ease an upset stomach by pouring 2 cups of boiling water over 3 4-inch sprigs of mint and steeping 10 minutes. Drink the tea hot or cold.

ITALIAN PARSLEY

More than just a garnish, Italian parsley is an unbeatable herb for flavoring vinaigrettes, sauces, and soups. Its flat, serrated leaves emerge from the center of the plant, so harvest stems from the outside in, cutting them off near the soil line. Never take more than a third of the stems at one time—the plant needs some leaves to continue growing.

use
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Add a dose of good-for-you greens to breakfast by blending a few tablespoons of parsley leaves into a blueberry smoothie.

CHIVES

Try either garlic chives, which have white star-like flowers and flat, solid leaves with a mild garlic flavor; or regular chives, which have round, hollow, onion-flavored leaves and purple pompom flowers. Clip off leaves in small clumps, harvesting the outermost ones first.

use
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Make herb butter by stirring a few tablespoons of minced chives into a stick of softened butter or buttery spread, along with a teaspoon each of chopped capers and Dijon mustard. Melt the butter over steamed veggies.

VARIEGATED LEMON THYME

This low-growing herb sports pretty green leaves dappled with yellow. Its bright, lemony flavor adds delicious herbal undertones to dishes. Use scissors to snip off sprigs, making the cut right above a set of leaves and harvesting no more than a third of each stem.

use
it

Smear goat cheese on a sheet of thawed puff pastry, leaving a 1-inch border. Top with roasted root veggies, and sprinkle with 2 teaspoons of lemon thyme leaves. Bake at 400°F 20 minutes, or until golden.



GEAR UP!

EcoForms Containers Made from rice hulls, these biodegradable containers are designed to last for up to 10 years of indoor use. They come in a variety of shapes and sizes (we love Bowl 7, shown above at left and right). \$4.99; ecoforms.com

Compact Tabletop SunLite Garden A steel-framed grow light that provides the right amount of light for indoor plants, and the light fixture adjusts to accommodate herbs as they grow. \$149; gardeners.com

Mini Herb Snips The powder-coated steel handles of these herb scissors (shown on p. 38) are spring-loaded, which makes harvesting a breeze, and the needle-nose blades allow for precision snipping. \$14.95; williams-sonoma.com

GROWING TIPS

PLANT SEEDLINGS Indoor herbs grow best from seedlings as opposed to seeds. Buy starter plants at a local nursery or online from Territorial Seed (territorialseed.com), and plant seedlings at the same depth they were growing in their nursery containers. Use a regular potting mix for mint, parsley, and chives. Bay and thyme like very well-drained soil, so plant them in a 1:1 ratio of cactus mix and regular potting soil.

GO BIG Choose pots that are at least 5 inches wide and deep—any smaller and you risk root-bound plants. Once the bay plant reaches 8 to 12 inches, repot it into a 1-gallon (or larger if you can spare the space) container. Grow one plant per pot, and make sure the pots have holes in the bottom so water can drain out.

LET THERE BE LIGHT To avoid plants growing weak and spindly from a lack of light, place them in a sunny south-facing window that gets at least 6 hours of bright sunlight every day. Even better, set them under a grow light that stays on for 16 hours a day and off for 8 hours at night. Using supplemental light encourages more robust growth.

WATER SPARINGLY The roots of pot-grown plants are prone to rotting: indoor herbs most often die from soil that stays too wet, rather than overly dry. Test the soil moisture frequently with the tip of your finger, and water only if the soil is dry down to the top of your first knuckle.

INCREASE HUMIDITY Indoor herbs prefer drier soil, but their leaves appreciate a bit of humidity. Set the pots on a shallow tray filled with river rocks. Fill the space between the rocks with water, making sure that the bottoms of the pots stay above the water line. As the water evaporates, it helps humidify the air directly around the plants.

FERTILIZE LATER Wait to fertilize until daylight hours begin to lengthen in spring and the plants begin to actively grow. Water the plants with a liquid organic fertilizer, such as Dr. Earth Liquid Solution Concentrate, once a month. Follow the fertilizer application rates and directions on the label. 🌱

Willi Galloway is the author of the edible gardening book Grow Cook Eat: A Food Lover's Guide to Vegetable Gardening.