



Perennial Herbs



Photo credit: Cornell Botanic Gardens

Perennial herbs are timesavers because they don't need to be replanted each year. Some such as lavender and sage require a hot sunny well-drained location to grow well and live longer. Try them in your best drained location, on a slope, and consider mulching with pea gravel instead of wet organic mulches that might encourage rot. Wait until spring to cut back winter-killed branch tips or to shape the plant. The green-leaved culinary sage blooms heavily and is very attractive to bees. The purple-leaved sage rarely blooms and may only persist for 3 or 4 years.

Lavender is the quintessential Mediterranean herb, so most of us will not have luck trying to grow lavender hedges. However, my 'Hidcote' lavender has lasted for 12 years, with more or less winter dieback, in an exposed position with lots of winter sun.

Thyme is a short spreading shrublet available in different varieties, including lemon or caraway thyme. Thyme also needs sun, heat, and good drainage.

Greek oregano, *Origanum heracleoticum*, is the best-flavored oregano, much better than the common oregano grown from seed. Sun and well-drained soil will help it to overwinter.

Other herbs are less fussy. Chives and garlic chives will grow in sun or light shade in almost any well-drained soil. Both are frequently grown as multipurpose ornamentals. Chives blooms with edible lavender flowers in late spring, while garlic chives has white flower clusters in late summer. It's best to deadhead both to avoid too many seedlings. Clumps are easily divided.

Lovage is a large plant with leaves that can be substituted for celery in soups or stews. Sun or light shade and normal soil are fine.

Salad burnet forms a rosette of scalloped leaves and grows in sun or light shade with adequate moisture. Young leaves taste like cucumbers and can be used in salads or as garnishes.

Horseradish is an aggressive grower so position carefully. Harvesting some roots in the fall should help control it. Harvested roots can be stored in a cool root cellar in dry sand.



Sweet cicely is a hardy perennial with ornamental fern-like leaves and a scent like lovage. Moist well-drained soil in light shade suits it. Leaves, seeds, and roots are all used in recipes.

Tarragon is one of the French ‘fines herbes,’ but its strong flavor may overshadow other herbs. The



Fennel flower

Photo credit: Doryce S via Flickr

leaves can be used fresh or in sauces. The best-flavored kind is the French tarragon, which should be obtained as a plant, not grown from seed. With good drainage, tarragon is hardy to zone 4. It prefers some shade.

Lemon balm, like many mints, spreads aggressively. The leaves are best used fresh in salads or cooking. Dried leaves can be used for tea.

Hops is a perennial vine. Female vines produce fragrant strobiles used in beer making.

Fennel, dill, and cilantro will self-sow in favorable sites and thus perform as perennials.

Published: March 2017

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Cornell Botanic Gardens

Robison York State Herb Garden features over 500 plant varieties of herbs, or plants that have human use or significance. The herbs are uniquely arranged into 17 theme beds, including Herbs of the Ancients, Bee Herbs, Culinary Herbs, Dye Herbs, Edible Flowers, Economic Herbs, Fragrant Herbs, Herbs in Literature, Lavender, Medicinal Herbs, Herbs of Native Americans, Ornamental Herbs, Sacred Herbs, Salads and Potherbs, Savory Seed Herbs, Tea Herbs, and Tussie Mussies and Nosegays. In the garden, each plant is labeled with its common and scientific name, and its use.

<http://www.cornellbotanicgardens.org/our-gardens/botanical/herb-garden>