

**TOP  
10**

**1**

# garden herbs

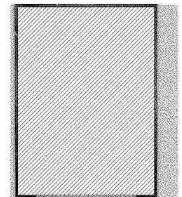
These fragrant, delicious herbs add flavor to any kitchen concoction.

by Danielle Calkins

Smell that? The fragrance in my kitchen is absolutely divine. Snippets of fresh basil are mingling with my pasta sauce. And me? I'm in heaven. If you crave seductive scents like this all year long, growing fresh herbs will do the trick. Whether you're tilling a full vegetable garden out back or tending a few small containers in your kitchen, you'll find success by picking the right plants for your space.

The minute I got my hands on Andrea Bellamy's *Sugar Snaps and Strawberries*, I was hooked. Yes, I adore the book's title, but, even better, I found all the growing tips I needed for planting my favorite herbs this season. Last summer I grew basil and oregano—and I'm ready to branch out. That will mean even more flavorful meals from my kitchen.

These Top 10 herbs are not only wonderful to sniff and taste, they'll save you time and money when you plan menus. Best of all, many can be dried for use all year long. Look for them from our friends at [Bonnie Plants](#). With so many herb varieties to choose from, you'll find just the right ones to add tempting aromas to your kitchen.









1



**Apple Mint**

(*Mentha suaveolens*, Zones 5 to 9)

One of the easiest herbs to grow, apple mint is a natural for containers or other small spaces. While you'll enjoy the mint flavor, the unexpected fruity tones are delightful, too. Be sure to keep up with the wandering ways of this herb and pick leaves frequently. With container plants, tucking stray mint back into the pot will help control growth.

**Tastes great in:** Two things to try: Add crushed leaves to ice water for a refreshing summer drink, or steep in hot water for tea.

2



**Chive**

(*Allium* spp., Zones 3 to 9)

Versatile chives impart a subtle oniony flavor to food. Dead-head or grow in containers to keep these plants in check. With their mauve flowers, chives are pretty as edging plants for beds and filler plants for containers. Harvest from spring through fall.

**Tastes great in:** Try adding chives to all kinds of vegetables; just saute in oil along with some garlic for a tasty side dish. Or impress your guests by adding chive flowers to a salad.

5



**Oregano**

(*Origanum* spp., Zones 5 to 10)

Though it's similar to marjoram, frost-tolerant oregano is a safer choice for cold climates—and here in Wisconsin, winter can go beyond cold to brutal. Drying oregano increases its flavor. Simply cut whole stems, hang them in a cool, dry place, and voilà—a lovely herb to sprinkle on pizza and much more any month of the year.

**Tastes great in:** Skip the Mediterranean restaurant tonight and make a savory omelet or frittata instead. Adding fresh oregano will provide just the right touch to inspire you to eat at home more often.

6



**Dill**

(*Anethum graveolens*, annual)

While dill grows well in the garden alongside tomatoes, sweet peppers or chilies, it needs space to flourish. It wasn't until dill arrived in my CSA box last year as part of my crop share that I first had the chance to use it. Since it's easy to grow in full sun, I'll try planting my own this time around. I've been warned it likes to seed itself, so keep that in mind.

**Tastes great in:** Calling all pickle fans! Summer is the perfect time to make your own fresh, delicious dills. When it's warm out, I could polish off a jar of these crunchy treats pretty quickly all by myself.

9



**Parsley**

(*Petroselinum crispum*, annual)

Let's first distinguish between two popular parsley varieties. If cooking is your calling, flat-leafed Italian parsley has your name on it; it's delicious in dozens of dishes. Looking for an attractive container plant or plate garnish? Curly-leafed parsley is the way to go. Both varieties are relatively easy to grow.

**Tastes great in:** Grab your calendar and make note of summer cookouts and tailgating parties. When a potato or veggie salad is your dish to pass, you'll be grateful for the fresh green sprigs and leaves from your parsley plant.

10



**Sage**

(*Salvia officinalis*, Zones 5 to 9)

Here's a champion herb if you ever saw one, a species that works equally well in borders, beds and containers. The gray-green, chartreuse or dusky-purple foliage is an eye-catching accent to any planting. After four years, the plant becomes woody and may need to be replaced. It's easy: Just take a cutting and start a new plant.

**Tastes great in:** While many of us add sage to turkey or chicken stuffing around the holidays, it's also an enchanting addition to couscous, quinoa and other grains.

CLAUDIO SATO / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; ALL OTHER HERBS COURTESY OF BONNIE PLANTS; POT: MADLEN / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



# 3

## Basil

(*Ocimum* spp., annual)

A favorite in Asian and Italian cooking, basil grows marvelously in containers. Basil seeds can begin indoors 4 to 6 weeks before the last frost. To harvest, pinch off the tips of the stems; make sure you do this regularly for best growth. At the end of the season, freeze or dry what's left.

**Tastes great in:** While basil is delicious in almost any Italian dish, don't be afraid to take another tack. For a simple vinaigrette or marinade, heat white wine vinegar and pour over fresh basil. After 24 hours, strain and discard leaves.



# 4

## Rosemary

(*Rosmarinus officinalis*, Zones 8 to 11)

If you're looking for an edible yet substantial shrub, rosemary will fit your yard beautifully. Grow it in containers or in the garden in milder regions or you can even trim it as a hedge. For container planting, use pots at least 8 inches deep. In cool climates, overwinter rosemary indoors, but keep an eye out for powdery mildew.

**Tastes great in:** Add rosemary to any poultry dish and you'll have a crowd-pleaser. Use the edible flowers in salads, herb butters and cream cheese spreads.



# 7

## Cilantro

(*Coriandrum sativum*, annual)

You may know this popular plant as coriander, a name it shares with the sweet spice made by drying the seeds. Cilantro plants, with their aromatic dark-green leaves, do well in both gardens and containers. The tiny white flowers attract beneficial insects, so try spreading these plants throughout your garden.

**Tastes great in:** Cilantro leaves are a must in Mexican cooking and many Asian cuisines. Try fiesta grilled corn or cilantro potatoes for dinner tonight. Sounds good to me!



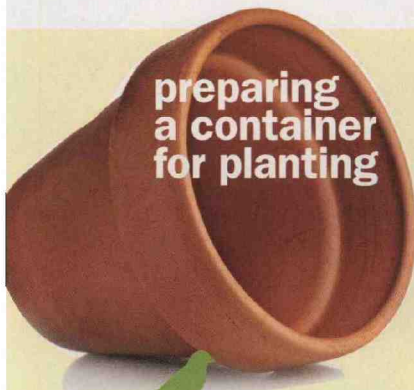
# 8

## Thyme

(*Thymus* spp., Zones 5 to 9)

Adorned with pretty purple, pink or white flowers, this silvery herb likes containers at least 6 inches deep. Avoid overwatering and be sure to pinch back the tips to encourage bushy growth, or simply snip entire stems at soil level. As long as you avoid overwatering, thyme will thrive in full sun and well-drained soil.

**Tastes great in:** Thyme is superb with sweet corn; try adding snippets to the butter before slathering it on a freshly grilled ear. I guarantee you'll love it.



**preparing  
a container  
for planting**

Many of these herbs thrive in containers, but proper prep is a must. First, when planting in used or recycled containers, be sure to clean and sterilize them. Often a container will have diseases, mold or other fungi that can infect healthy new plants.

To clean a pot, remove all debris, rinse and then soak overnight in a solution of 1 part bleach and 9 parts water. Finally, scrub well and rinse again.

If the container you're using doesn't have proper drainage, drill a hole in the bottom. Placing a coffee filter over the drainage hole will prevent soil loss. Before planting, put the pot where you intend to keep it; full pots can get heavy. Look for a premium organic potting soil or container mix, which will promote good air circulation and drainage.

Once you're all set, plant your herbs, watch them grow and get ready to cook!

### ON THE WEB

Look for our Top 10 list of container plants—and add your own favorites to them—at [birdsandblooms.com/mag](http://birdsandblooms.com/mag).



Danielle Calkins is the associate digital editor for Birds & Blooms. This year she has big plans to continue supporting her local CSA while growing her own fresh herbs and veggies to fuel her love of cooking.