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Herbs For A Spaghetti Garden

By Tim Henry

Herbs are one of the delightful pleasures of life. They add flavor to your food, scent to the air and beauty to your garden. In colonial times, no home was complete without an herb garden for the lady of the house to use in her kitchen, and it wasn't unusual for those herb gardens to be separated by use - savory herbs, tea herbs, medicinal herbs. That's a tradition that's made a comeback in many modern gardens.

One of the more popular types of kitchen gardens is a spaghetti garden. Oregano, basil, garlic, bay and parsley are such easy to grow plants that it's a pity for anyone to use dried and bottled herbs if they have a sunny patch of ground or a window-box. A few square feet of garden space can easily yield all the herbs that you'll need for delicious Italian meals. They're even easy enough to grow in a sunny window for year round use.

Bay Laurel

Bay leaves add a piquant hint of spice to stews, soups and especially spaghetti sauce. The bay laurel is a small tree that grows slowly - about a foot per year - making it eminently suitable for growing in a container. Unless you live in a mild climate zone (where the temperatures don't drop below 25 degrees in the winter), you'll do best to keep the tree in a pot and bring it indoors during the winter.

Basil

Basil is an annual, but it seeds itself so easily that I've never had to buy another after planting my first year. There are many varieties of basil, but all grow fast and require frequent pinching back to keep them from growing leggy and tall. To harvest: when the plants have reached about 6-8 inches tall, you can begin harvesting. Simply use your thumb and forefinger to pinch off the top 1/3 of the plant, just above a leaf intersection. Be sure to pinch off any flower buds before they go to seed. Six to eight plants will provide enough basil to make pesto for the entire neighborhood.

Garlic

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Garlic is possibly the easiest plant in the world to grow. Simply break apart a clove of garlic (yes, right from the grocery store!), and plant the cloves about 4 inches apart, 2–4 inches deep in light soil. Water lightly, and watch them grow. Harvest when tips of leaves turn brown - do NOT let them flower. To harvest: dig up the bulbs, and use them. In the interests of keeping a fresh supply going, plant one or two cloves from each bulb!

Parsley

Parsley is easily the most used herb in the world. It comes in both flat (Italian) and curly varieties, and complements the flavor of everything from delicate sauces to hearty stews. It's often used as a garnish on plates, or chopped and added to soups, dressings and salads. It adds vitamins and color, and subtly brings out the flavor of other ingredients in the meal. The parsley plant is a biennial, flowering in its second season. It prefers a little shade on a hot sunny day, and should be kept well watered to avoid wilting and drying. To harvest: pinch back woody older stems all the way to the base, allowing

new leaves and branches to grow.

Oregano

A perennial ground cover plant, oregano is a prolific grower that can send out shoots that grow up to six feet in a single season. If encouraged with pruning and bunching, oregano can grow into a small border plant. It prefers light, thin soil and lots of sun, so keep it on the south side of your garden. Harvesting can start when the plants reach 4–5 inches. Simply pinch back as you would basil. The young leaves are the most flavorful part of the plant, and are actually considerably stronger dried than fresh. To dry, lay the harvested leaves out on newspaper or drying screens in the sun until the leaves crumble easily. Dried oregano will retain its flavor for months.

This article courtesy of

<http://www.florists-guide.com>

Grow Your Own Produce For Fresh Cooking

By Lee Dobbins

There's nothing like cooking with fresh produce and what better way to have them readily available than to grow your own kitchen garden! A kitchen garden not only gives you good fresh produce but it also adds a bit of interest to your yard. It can be as simple as just a few herbs or you can go all out and grow vegetables too.

Fruit, vegetables and herbs are very rewarding to grow and there's an extra special flavor to produce you've grown yourself. Plus you know that no pesticides or chemicals have been used when you grow

it yourself.

While cooking with fresh foods you've grown yourself might sound great, be warned, a kitchen garden is going to be very labor-intensive. If you don't like gardening or working outside, you might be better off getting your produce at the grocery store. The only way you're going to get a good healthy crop of fruit, vegetables and herbs is by lavishing tender loving care and attention on them.

If you do decide that a kitchen garden is for you, start growing early and you may produce a bountiful crop weeks ahead of the normal time. This will give you a good harvest during a time when those fruits and vegetables are particularly expensive in the store.

You can make your kitchen garden as functional and attractive as possible with careful planning. If space is at a premium you can choose some of the more decorative vegetables and herbs and plant them in your flower beds.

Make sure you pick a sunny site in your garden as most herbs and vegetables need the sun to do well. If you are growing fruit trees, you should ensure that they do not cast a shadow over the vegetables and herbs.

When planting your herbs, remember that they will stay green almost all year so make sure you plan for how they will contrast with the existing plants. Tall herbs can be planted at the back of a traditional flower garden and low-growing herbs make excellent flower garden borders.

If you don't have a lot of garden space, you can plant herbs in containers and they will do well. You can also plant many vegetables in containers. Peas, potatoes and tomatoes are just a few that will do well.

Some vegetables are even attractive enough to be planted amongst the flowers – but remember that you are going to have gaps once the vegetables are harvested.

Many people think you need acres of land to have fruit trees, but there is a large range of fruit that you can grow even if you have a small yard. Small apple trees can even grow in pots on the patio and strawberries do well in containers. There's even varieties of cordon-trained apples and pears that can be grown against a garden fence.

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If you want to enjoy the flavor of fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs in your gourmet cooking, there really is no reason at all why you can't have the joy of growing and harvesting food for your own kitchen table in your own kitchen garden, no matter how small the plot.

Lee Dobbins writes for

Online Gourmet Foods

where you can learn more about gourmet eating.



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