



Creative Gardener

INSPIRING GARDENERS TO CREATE

WWW.THECREATIVEGARDENER.COM

A creative gardener sees not only the plants...the soil...the sun...the rain, but celebrates the garden for it's usefulness beyond the growing.

A taste of herb tea, a bouquet of flowers on the table, captured fragrance in a bowl of rose petals. Anything that inspires creativity from and in the garden.

The fine art & craft of waiting for the peak time of day to pick herbs for dinner, a passionate quest to find that perfect perennial for the cutting garden, making a fragrant gift for a friend and so much more.

In these pages you'll find inspirations for the creative gardener in all of us, how-to's to make it happen, notes from classes and seminars as well as many new discoveries along the way.

Sue

A Garden of Useful Herbs

With so many herb varieties to choose from, what plants do you grow? Start with a theme, and create a garden of herbs used for a specific purpose such as, culinary, aromatherapy or crafting. Then choose what herbs you prefer that meet the theme. Don't bother growing herbs you may not harvest for use. Save room for the tastes and fragrances you like and will also enjoy weeding and caring for, rather than regretting planting them because they spread all over or grew big and woody.

Design notes:

An outdoor herb garden can be as ornate or as simple as you would like. Think creatively to add interest in all seasons. Planting beds and layouts with structure will give year-around texture to the garden. A design aspect to herb growing is that it is a space that will always be cut and harvested from. Defining permanent framework will allow plants to come and go without taking away the design. Start by drawing lines. Enclose, circle or make pathways to form space. Move beyond the frumpy, treated wood rectangles. Framework created with living plants such as true dwarf English boxwood or adornments such as woven willow hurdles and brick or stone will give design and permanence. Build pathways for easy access and to creatively guide the eye and focus through a space. Garden structures such as obelisks, trelliswork and garden art allows the introduction of color and style.



Maximize the design of an herb garden by planting

artistically. Avoid straight rows and lay out garden beds with creative patterns that intermingle with each other reminiscent of small knot gardens. Fringe walkways with lettuce and parsley. Serpentine chives thru a flower bed or create geometric diamond shapes of bush basil around caged tomatoes. Add another creative element by incorporating vegetables into mixed plantings. Plant pretty food by choosing varieties of vegetables that add color and texture. This not only enhances to design, but adds more to enjoy as a harvest. Lacy lettuce, purple cabbage, royal burgundy pole beans and edible flowers all add living color.

Herb Garden Basics

Organic and natural are a must when growing and caring for edibles in the garden. What goes on the plants eventually goes in the body. It is healthy for you and good for the environment to grow and care for plants naturally.

Sun

A cultural necessity of an herb garden is that it will need the sunniest spot in the garden. Most herbs prefer full sun or a good quality of warm sun for most of the day. Look for microclimates of reflective light and warmth if sun is a challenge. Assess the light when the summer sun is high to see where it plays or is overshadowed by neighboring buildings or trees. Do not overlook warm brick walls between buildings, rooftops or balconies. In the planning layout, place taller herbs like dill where they won't shade the other herbs.

Soil

Herbs thrive in loose, organic soil. Amendments like well-rotted compost will add nutrition and help the soil structure. Well draining soil is a must since most have Mediterranean ancestry and hate wet feet. In planting bed preparation, make sure the soil is turned, loosened and amended.

Planting beds

The ideal growing space is a raised bed. This style of planting bed keeps soil healthy and well-draining...the herbs love it. Size and place the raised beds where they are easy to harvest from and no wider than 3 feet. This size makes an easy reach to harvest without having to step in and compact the soil.

Potted Herbs

Where no planting beds are available, elegant potted gardens will fill the niche for growing edibles. Look for containers at least 2 feet wide and tall to maximize choices of plants to grow. A large roomy pot can hold a mix of different herbs or plant individual varieties in numerous pots and create an attractive grouping.



Herb Gardens

We adorn the garden with them and breathe in their fragrances. We grow and use them for their aromatic and medicinal attributes. We enhance our taste buds with their flavors. Begin an herbal journey in the garden. What are herbs anyway? A simple botanical definition describes them as generally soft-stemmed, herbaceous, not woody like trees. Herbs are represented in the annual, perennial, biennial families. They are plants that have distinctive essential oils in their soft plant tissues; it is what gives them their flavor and fragrance. With such a broad range of plants, lets narrow the field and personalize the garden by exploring plants cultivated for their usefulness...their value is in fragrance, flavoring, cosmetic and medicinal uses.

Basil: Great for fresh dishes like pesto, an annual that loves the warmth of summer so wait until evening temperatures stay consistently above 50 degrees before placing plants out in the garden.

Chives: This plant makes healthy abundant grass-like clumps and is the easiest herb to grow with purple flowers brighten the landscape. The flowers also have a spicy onion flavor that can be added to salads and vinegars.

Dill: ferny, fragrant with the smell of pickles. Use fresh leaves for flavor, seed heads for pickling.

Lavender: A classic aromatherapy and crafting favorite. Grow the English and intermedia hybrid varieties for best crafting and fragrance.

Mints: This can be an aggressive spreader so contain them in pots. Cooling and stimulating, fragrant, good for upset tummy tea. An after dinner mint is based on medicinal lore that it would help digest greasy and fatty foods.

Oregano: Greek oregano is the most pungent and flavorful, use the leaves fresh but have some dried for sauces and mixes.

Parsley: The Italian flat leaved variety has better flavor than the curly leaf. It is a biennial plant, so allow some to go to seed the second year to have the crop return. Rich in Vitamin A and C, it is a healer both internally and externally.

Sage: Earthy and pungent, Most popular use is turkey stuffing. Use colorful varieties to add dimension to the herb garden.

Rosemary: Pungent and aromatic, plant in the full sun for best growth. Classic varieties like 'Tuscan Blue' have a sky blue bloom in the winter months. Not just for cooking, rosemary is also used as an antiseptic and bathing herb.

Thyme: Use creeping varieties in-between stepping-stones and use the upright types for cooking. The variegated yellow lemon thyme variety has a great flavor and fragrance. And in case you'd like to know, it is well known for its anti-fungal qualities in skin care.

When you explore uses you become knowledgeable about herbs and how to harvest and what parts to use. Learn and experiment are the most useful ways to discover herbs.

A Herbal Harvest

Herb fragrance and flavor come from essential oils in leaves and stems and are at their most flavorful and fragrant in the morning after the dew dries. Cut the stems to avoid damage, do not pluck or pull. Harvest as needed for fresh use. Leave about 4" of stem remaining on leafy annuals and about a third on leafy perennials. Rinse enough to clean before use, avoid a heavy rinse. Larger leaves can spin dry in a "salad" spinner. A good way to store fresh stems for use within a few days is to place them in a clean jar of fresh, cold water "bouquet style" and refrigerate. The harvested part of the plant depends on its use.

Leaves: Young tender leaves have the highest amount of flavor and fragrance; harvest as needed. Never let leafy herbs go to flower or the flavor may be lost, it also sends a signal to the plant to halt leaf production. To preserve herb leaves, air-drying is the easiest method. A drying room should be a dark, airy place with no direct sunlight. Harvest and tie in loose bundles. Hang bundles or lay smaller, weak-stemmed plants on drying screens. Before storage, make sure herbs are absolutely "cornflake" dry to avoid mold. Strip leaves off the stems and store in glass jars. Don't forget to label your harvest; most herbs look a lot alike after they are dried. Store leaves whole for most uses like teas and bath preparations. They can be crushed down anytime as needed.

Flowers: From peppery nasturtium blossoms to tangy chive heads, use flowers of herbs in culinary dishes, harvest just as it begins to flower and no later than it's peak of color. The look, taste, and quality will fade if the flower is over bloomed. Most herbal flowers are best used fresh.

Freezing method: Herbs can be frozen for culinary use or poultices. Make herbal ice cubes by putting about 1 teaspoon of fresh cut herbs or a whole leaf or two in each section of an ice cube tray. Top with water and freeze. After frozen in to cubes they can be placed in freezer bags for frozen storage. Essentially the herb is captured in frozen water and lingers a fresh taste to use in soups, stews or iced drinks. Also great to soothe overheated skin by rubbing lavender and mint ice cubes over the surface of neck, arms and face.

Any Herb Recipes

Skin Care

Herbal Bath Salt

1 cup sea salt, coarse grind
 ½ cup Baking Soda
 ½ cup dried herb

Combine ingredients well. For a fine blend, ingredients can be ground together. Place in a muslin bag. To use: place mix in a warm bath. Bathe for a minimum of 15 minutes to capture the full benefits of the herbs.

Herbal Spa Salt Glow

1 cup of fine sea salt
 2 cups coconut oil
 10 to 20 drops of essential oil
 ¼ cup crumbled or finely cut herb

Place all ingredients in a wide mouth jar. Blend well. To Use: Dampen skin. Massage the mixture into the skin. Use carefully on sensitive or damaged skin.

Herbal Tub Tea

Place dried or fresh herb into a muslin bag or press and seal tea bags. Float in a warm bath to create an herbal infusion. Soak in the tub for at least 15 minutes to receive the full benefits of the herbal ingredients.

Household Use

Linen Spray

To 4 cups of water, simmer approx. ½ cup of herbs. Allow to cool and strain out the herb. Pour into a spray mister and add 5-10 drops of an essential oil to enhance. Shake well before each use. Test fabric before spraying, essential oils may stain.

Herbal Scouring Powder

1 cup Baking Soda
 ¼ cup Borax
 ½ cup ground herb
 Mix well. Place in Shaker can. Use to scour sinks and tubs for a fragrant, gentle and easy on the environment abrasive.

Herbal Dryer Sheet

Place a few drops of herbal essential oil on a washcloth and toss in the dryer with a load of clothes to freshen laundry. Reuse and refresh with oil as needed.



Culinary Recipes

Herb Butter

1 cube unsalted butter
 1 teaspoon lemon juice
 2-3 tablespoons fresh herb, chopped
 Soften butter, add remaining ingredients, cream together well, place in tightly covered container and refrigerate overnight for best flavor. A classic blend made with chives for a baked potato topper or garlic for hot French bread.

Herbal Cream Cheese

8 ounce package of cream cheese, softened
 1 to 2 Tablespoons chopped fresh herb.
 Cream together ingredients until well mixed. Refrigerate overnight. If desired, sprinkle dried chopped herb on the surface of the cheese. Serve on crackers, bagels or warm breadsticks.

Herb Sugar

Wash and thoroughly dry fresh herb leaves. Place approximately an inch of sugar in the bottom of a jar. Add a leaf or two, repeat sugar and leaf layers until the jar is full. Let stand up to two weeks. The sugar herbal flavor will be infused in the sugar and can be used in recipes and coffee or tea.

Herb Tea

Boil water in a teakettle. Transfer boiling water into a warmed glass or ceramic teapot. Add a handful of fresh herb leaves and allow to steep for at least 10 minutes, longer for stronger tea.

Herb Ice Cubes

Wash and clean fresh herb leaves. Add a leaf or two or approx. 1 teaspoon of herb to each ice cube section in an ice cube tray. Cover with cold water and freeze solid. Pop out cubes and store in freezer bags. Use mint cubes in teas. Make basil and oregano cubes to add to sauces and soups during cooking.

Herb Pesto

3 cups fresh packed herb leaves
 ½ cup olive oil
 2 cloves (or more for garlic lovers)
 1 teaspoon salt, if desired
 ½ cup fresh grated Parmesan cheese
 2 tablespoons of nuts, (pine nuts, walnuts or sunflower seeds)
 Process herb leaves and garlic together in a food processor, drizzle in olive oil and blend until thoroughly pureed. Transfer to bowl and add remained ingredients, mix well. Serve over warm pasta, spread on French bread or in place of tomato sauce on pizza. Try a cilantro pesto on warmed tortillas or fajitas.

Upcoming Classes & Events

Paradise (to be) regained

Display garden.
Northwest Flower and Garden Show
February 23-27, 2011

Herb Garden Favorites

Northwest Flower and Garden show
February 24, 2011 on the DIY Stage
4:15 pm

A five senses discovery in the herb garden. Get to know favorite herbs to grow for fragrance, culinary, healing and more. Plus a list of top ten favorite herbs and the many ways to grow and use them. Show and tell ideas and tips for growing, harvesting and preserving. Also included: recipes that use "any" herb. Recipes that personalize crafting, care and culinary items by using the herb you choose!

Plant Sale

March 12 from 9 to 4
Plants from the Northwest Flower and Garden show display and other garden findings for sale. 4008 81st Ave. CT. NW, Gig Harbor, WA. 98335 253-265-2209

Design Studio

Design Studio appointments now being taken for spring. Girlfriend and garden friend gatherings welcome for up to 4 people. Visit the design studio page at www.thecreativegardener.com for more information.

Contact information:

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Creative Garden Guides Herbs ...to see...to smell...to taste

This charming herb booklet is all about discovering herbs. A compilation of notes and tips from Sue's herb classes. First printed in 1993, this updated version has doubled in size as it invites the exploration of herbs. Included are growing, harvesting and preserving tips. Hand drawn garden layouts, recipes and information from crafting to culinary use.



In Love with Lavender

The second in a series of guides for teasing your senses into the vast world of growing and using herbs from the garden. The Lavender edition is filled with traditional uses, history, growing information and much more. Over 30 recipes and how-to's that will make you fall in Love with Lavender.

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Floribunda
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Garden by Design & Garden Coaching

"A landscape becomes so much more when a design is infused into it. It becomes more than just a place to put plants or the mechanics of it. It is the love of the design by combining plants, garden décor, and creativity."

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