

Spice Up Your Garden With Herbs

Herbs are a pleasure in the garden and the kitchen. More people are using herbs in cooking to reduce salt, add flavor and sometimes for health reasons. An added benefit of their use is that you can grow them yourself. Also, if deer have been a problem, herbs like rosemary, thyme and others are known to deter them and may help.

Herbs are good for new and older gardeners. They grow quickly and easily if you follow these tips that I took from articles written by UGA agricultural scientists Wayne McLaurin, Sharon Omahen and Jerry Walker.

Select a sunny well-drained growing site. Look for a place that gets six hours of sun a day. Add organic matter or soil to build it up. Organic matter will also help hold water and fertilizer in sandy soils.

Have your soil tested and fertilize and lime accordingly. Soil pH is very important. Herbs like a slightly higher pH (more basic) than most of our soils supply.

It is not true that herbs do not need fertilizer. Just do not use too much nitrogen since this can make them grow too quickly and lower the oil content of the herbs. They will be large but bland. Adding compost is a good idea.

Nematodes can be a problem with herbs. Nematodes are microscopic worms that feed on roots. You can do a special soil sample in the growing season, if you have them. If you do find them, plan to plant elsewhere next year. Some herbs may be resistant to some nematodes. These include sweet marjoram, oregano and peppermint. Thyme is slightly tolerant while dill and oregano are the most susceptible.

Plan before you plant. Plant around a focal point - bird bath, gazing ball or sundial. Add paths, stones and other features. Label herbs. Leave room for expansion.

Plant at the proper spacing. This varies, but 18 to 24 inches apart is a good rule of thumb for perennials. Some herbs like thyme or parsley can be planted closer - about 6 to 8 inches apart.

Water immediately after planting. After herbs get started, let soil dry slightly between waterings. Most herbs need dryer conditions than most plants. Too much water can cause root rot.

Mulch to prevent weeds and conserve moisture. This is very important. Most of us do not have enough time to pull every weed. Mulches prevent them coming up. You can use pine straw, pine bark or other sources.

An interesting idea is to lay two to three pages of newspaper on the ground, wet it to keep it in place and then cover with a mulch. This reuses newspapers and keeps down weeds. Just do not use color print since they may have toxic inks in them.

Hope this helps with your herbs. Look for them soon at the garden centers. For more information call the Franklin County Extension Office at 706 384-2843.

There is also a new herb bulletin available on the UGA Extension website called "Herbs for Southern Gardens." The address is: [http://www.caes.uga.edu/Publications Bulletin 1170](http://www.caes.uga.edu/Publications/Bulletin%201170).

