

Top Medicinal Herbs You Can Grow In Your Backyard!

With plentiful information about medicinal herbs online and the benefits of medicinal herbs well documented, many health-conscious gardeners are becoming interested in growing herbs in their gardens. Many of the herbs commonly used as food spices also have medicinal qualities so that working healthful herbs into your garden produce is much easier than you might expect.

They Look Pretty, Grow Well, and Are Good for You

An herb garden can be a fragrant and attractive addition to your backyard. Many herbs are very hardy and require little in the way of care, a definite plus for the busy gardener. Many of these flowers and small shrubs that smell good, taste good, and look nice are also medicinal herbs and plants. In fact, many of the most common and easily recognizable of these, substances often thought of simply as spices, are actually medicinal herbal plants with potential healing and preventative properties. Consider the brief list below.

BASIL

The annual herb basil grows low to the ground at a height of about eighteen inches. Individual plants should be about a foot apart. Basil has a strong, sweet smell and grows best in hot, dry conditions. As a seasoning for cooking, basil leaves are normally taken straight from the plant, washed and added to the given dish at the last moment. Basil will lose its flavor quickly when cooked.

However, usefulness does not end at the kitchen door for basil. Medicinal herb properties for basil include memory enhancement and a calming and strengthening of the nervous system. As an expectorant, basil will clear the throat and lungs and the juice will treat ear aches and fungal infections. An infusion or tea made from basil leaves will also settle gastric distress.

GARLIC

The perennial, garlic, which is closely related to onions is cultivated for its underground "head," a grouping of perhaps as many as a dozen pungent garlic cloves. To cultivate garlic, which grows in sprout-like clumps, plant individual cloves two inches deep in moist soil. In hot climates, keep your garlic plants as wet as possible. At four months the long, spout-like foliage of garlic will die back signaling that it is time to dig up the cloves.

Consumed either raw or used in foods, garlic is an extremely healthy herb. It has been found to lower fatty deposits in arteries by as much as fifty percent and to inhibit the formation of clots. It is an extremely strong herb and you can expect to have "garlic breath" after eating the cloves even when diced and cooked in a recipe. (Perhaps this is as good a reason as any to also plant refreshing mint in your backyard herb garden!)

LAVENDER

There are between 25 and thirty species of the herb lavender, which is a member of the mint family. All are hardy perennial plants with gray foliage and fragrant purplish leaves. (The height and degree of spread varies by species.) Lavender dries easily and is often used in sachets to freshen linen drawers, as an ingredient in potpourri, or as part of holiday wreaths and other rustic decorations. (Bundles of lavender are also said to ward off insects.)

For beekeepers, lavender flowers will yield excellent honey and oil extracted from lavender is both an antiseptic and a calming agent when used for aromatherapy. The oil applied to the temples and wrists or sachets placed inside a bed pillow will also help headaches and insomnia. When mixed with rosewater, witch hazel, or simply water itself, rosemary oil will treat acne and other skin irritations.

MARJORAM

In the southern United States marjoram is a perennial but in northern states is regarded as an annual. Marjoram grows to approximately one foot in height and individual plants should be spaced six inches apart. The plant is grown solely for the leaves which are cut when the plant begins to flower and are allowed to slowly dry in a shady location

Marjoram has many medicinal properties and is often used as an essential oil. It is a balancing and soothing herb with sedative and calming properties. It will lower the blood pressure, ease respiratory and stomach problems, cure headache, and tastes fantastic with lamb, fish, salads and soups.

MINT

There are literally several hundred varieties of mint with peppermint, spearmint, and pineapple mint being the most common and popular. All are easy to grow and tend to reach heights of two feet with an overall sprawling appearance. Of all the purported benefits of medicinal herbs, those attributed to mints are perhaps the most documented.

Not only do mints taste good, but they have a number of medicinal properties, in particular soothing gastric upsets. Peppermint used as a tea is particularly effective for stomach complaints, but some people report peppermint makes their heartburn worse. For children with colic or an “upset tummy” spearmint should be used because it is milder. (For adults spearmint has little benefit beyond a pleasant taste and a breath freshening effect.) When combined with rosemary, mint oil is a good hair conditioner and will control dandruff.

PARSLEY

The leaves of the bright green biennial, parsley, is often used as a seasoning or food garnish. Curly leaf parsley is the more decorative form while the flat leaf variety has a stronger flavor and is better for seasoning. Parsley is very easy to grow and will thrive in a pot on a window sill that gets lots of sunshine. Parsley should be kept wet.

Known primarily for its properties as a diuretic, parsley should not be eaten in large quantities by those with kidney problems. Premenstrual women fighting water retention will gain a great benefit from parsley and it is also effective in lowering mild cases of high blood pressure.

ROSEMARY

Some rosemary growing as high as two to three feet. Although it needs regular watering, rosemary is a hardy plant and will withstand intense heat if provided with a bit of shade during the day.

While it tastes spicy and flavorful when added to food, especially chicken dishes, rosemary also works as a mild analgesic. It will treat headaches and poor circulation and can even be used as a natural breath freshener. Rosemary oil is a very effective hair conditioner and anti-dandruff remedy. Traditionally rosemary has been thought to improve memory.

WORMWOOD

Often when people ask, “What is wormwood?” they will be told it is a popular landscaping plant. Certainly the gray-green leaves of the wormwood plant are attractive. The plant, which reaches a maximum height of about three feet, puts out yellow flowers in the summer. It is extremely bitter to the taste.

When used for medicinal purposes, wormwood is usually mixed with peppermint or caraway and in that combination treats gastric distress and irritable bowel syndrome. In this fashion the three herbs are normally brewed as a tea. Wormwood should not be used for more than a month at a time and has actually been declared unsafe by the Food and Drug Administration because the plant contains thujone, which damages the liver.

YARROW

This erect perennial grows from two to three feet in height and puts out clusters of small white or pink flowers. Yarrow is extremely resistant to drought and is often planted in dry areas to control erosion. Also, because it is a fragrant plant, yarrow is also excellent to attract butterflies into your garden.

Long used as a healing agent for cuts and abrasions, yarrow is both an astringent and a stimulant and has been used to treat everything from headaches to hemorrhoids. It will halt bleeding and will help bruises to heal more quickly. The essential oil extracted from yarrow will, when rubbed on the chest, soothe the congestion and body aches of both cold and flu.