

Easy Herbs for the Austin Area



Basil, (Ocimum basilicum)king of the herbs. Basil is used for flavoring foods, for indigestion, fever, colds, headaches, cramps, nausea, vomiting and constipation. It can also be used to soothe insect bites. Basil is anti-inflammatory and sweet basil contains many cancer preventing chemicals. It is very widely used in Mediterranean cuisine.

Growing basil is easy in this area. It loves sun and can withstand drought well. It is very sensitive to cold and has been considered an annual in this area. The first freezing weather will usually kill it. Plant it where it will receive plenty of sunlight and good drainage.

Thyme, (Thymus vulgaris)a powerful antiseptic. Ancient Romans believed that thyme promoted vigor and used it in their baths and spas. Singers use it to preserve their voices by gargling with a mixture of thyme, marjoram and honey. Thyme is a plant which cannot tolerate a lot of water. It must be planted where there is excellent drainage. Use a mixture of gravel and soil, or decomposed granite and soil for planting. It does not need a lot of watering or fertilizing in order to prosper.

One substance in thyme called thymol is a powerful antiseptic and can be used to kill antibiotic-resistant bacteria, the flesh-eating bacteria and MRSA version of staph.

Mint, (Mentha species) the most well-known herb. There are about 500 different mints and many other herbs belong to the mint family. In addition to aiding fresh breath, mint has a number of medicinal properties, including aiding digestion, soothing IBS symptoms, clearing nasal congestion, reducing nerve pain, and headaches. Menthol, a product of mint, is used in Vicks, Mentholatum and other old-time products to reduce congestion from colds. It is also used in topical pain relievers, such as Tiger Balm and Icy Hot. It kills oral bacteria and is widely used in chewing gum and mouthwashes for that purpose.

Mint is very easy to grow and can become invasive. Some people avoid having it spread through the garden by growing it in pots.

Purple Coneflower, (Echinacea purpurea), is an astringent herb used to build and enhance the immune system. As a blood purifier, Echinacea can increase the body's resistance to infection. Echinacea is an attractive plant to add to your landscape.

Rosemary, (Rosmarinus officinalis). A delicious culinary herb, Rosemary is often sprinkled on meat and potatoes. It is used to stimulate the circulation, and is useful in treating headaches, to improve memory and to stimulate the flow of bile. The essential oil of Rosemary can be used to treat dandruff and other scalp problems. Used in a diffuser, rosemary essential oil seems to improve memory. Plant it in full sun as a landscape plant and it will grow for many years and produce small blue flowers in cool weather.

Garden Sage, (Salvia officinalis), is frequently used in cooking poultry. Medicinally, it soothes sore throats and infected gums. It is a strong astringent, and can slow sweating, vaginal discharge, milk flow and diarrhea. It grows well in this climate and needs full sun.

Lemon balm (Melissa officinalis) is an easy to grow perennial herb which has a calming effect on the nervous system. It has a pleasant lemon scent and flavor and can be used as a tea to calm headaches, insomnia, and nervous tension. It is a member

of the mint family and is effective in treating upset stomach, gas and colic. Lemon balm freely reseeds itself and can become invasive. It can tolerate partial shade, and attract bees when it is blooming. The name Melissa means bee in Greek.

Calendula, Calendula officinalis, is an easily grown flowering plant with bright yellow to orange flowers. Planted in the fall, it will bloom all winter long and into the spring. The flowers are used to heal many types of skin problems and can be made into a soothing and healing salve. It needs full sun, and will reseed itself. Hot weather will cause it to die back.

Comfrey, Symphytum officinale, is commonly known as knitbone. It contains chemicals that aid in healing bones, ligaments, and sprains. It has large, hairy leaves and pretty blue flowers that form clusters. Grow it in partial shade. Our sun is too intense for it.

Cilantro (Coriandrum sativum), delivers a double benefit. The leaves are used in salads and various meat dishes, while the seed, known as coriander, is used to flavor meat and for medicinal purposes. Coriander helps to prevent and relieve indigestion and is useful in oil to massage people with arthritis. Cilantro is a cool weather plant which should be planted in the fall.

Dill (Anethum graveolens), a cool weather plant adds flavor to food and aids digestion. It is a host plant for swallowtail butterflies and you should plan to plant extra plants to share with them. Dill also promotes sleep.

Fennel (Foeniculum vulgare), is also a cool weather plant in our area and should be planted in the fall. Fennel is used in liquors, like Sambuca, and for flavoring fish, chicken broth and salads. It has a flavor of anise and helps digestion and flatulence. Mothers use it to help babies with colic. It is also a host plant for swallowtail butterflies.

Oregano (Oreganum vulgare). Numerous varieties exist. It likes full to partial sun and can be propagated from cuttings or seed. It is very drought resistant. Oregano is a staple seasoning of Italian and Greek food and of several other cuisines. It is very useful, as well, for treating coughs, muscle spasms, headaches, menstrual pain and sore joints. The essential oil of oregano is a powerful antibiotic and should be used with care under the advice of a trained herbalist.

Mexican Oregano (Poliomintha longiflora). Although it tastes very much like Italian oregano, the two plants are unrelated. This plant can grow to 3 feet in height and width and bears beautiful lavender flowers. Leaves and flowers can be used to make a tea and is used for flavoring meat, such as cabrito. Helpful with respiratory problems.

Garlic (Allium sativum). Grows well in cool weather and is best planted in the fall. Use plenty of compost and organic fertilizer. Many cuisines depend on garlic for flavoring. It is very beneficial to the heart and help to normalize cholesterol and blood pressure. Can also be used to deter insect pests with a homemade insect spray.

Onion (Allium cepa). Most cooks would be lost without onions. All members of the allium family are high in sulfur which helps to relieve cold symptoms, and arthritis and to regulate blood pressure. Plant in late winter and harvest when the foliage has died back.

Chiles (Capsicum species). Need full sun to moderate shade for part of the day. Plant outdoors in spring when weather warms about two weeks after you plant your tomatoes. There are many varieties of peppers, varying in color, size and degree of heat. Ground capsicum can be used in a homemade spray to deter insect pests. Chiles aid in circulation, and can help to heal ulcers, reduce fevers and promote digestion.