Homegrown Herbal Teas

Liz Bartlett, Frederick County Master Gardener, Special to News Post

QUESTION:
I enjoy drinking herbal teas – is it possible to grow my own herbs for teas, and if so, which teas would you recommend growing?

ANSWER:
Growing your own herbal teas is a gratifying experience. Enjoying the bounty of your own garden infused in a delicious cup of tea is cool, fun, and easy. In the summer, herbal teas are nice to drink both hot and cold. Herbal teas can be made with one plant or a blend of plants, depending on taste, or desired effect. We live in a climate where many herbs grow well, so there are many options available to you. Prior to planting, you'll need to prepare your soil, and figure out the basic design of your beds/gardens. For any questions you may have on soil preparation, you may contact the Maryland Extension Office.

The following are some suggested herbs to plant that grow well in the Frederick area. The herbs listed all enjoy direct sunlight, with no special watering needs. Once established, watering is accomplished either by natural rainfall, or every 3-4 days. The herbs can be enjoyed fresh or dried.

Calendula (Calendula officinalis) flowers – bright yellow and orange flowers are constant bloomers and an exciting and useful addition to any garden. Calendula (also known as pot marigold) repels some insects in the garden so is useful to plant around other plants. Excellent for skin health and digestive support, Calendula is has a slightly bitter and saffron-like taste.

Feverfew (Tanacetum parthenium) leaves and flowering aerial parts – known for its use as a headache remedy, feverfew has little daisy-like flowers, and is a pretty addition to an herb garden.

Holy Basil (Ocimum sanctum) leaves – not the garden type basil, Holy Basil is considered an adaptogen, which is a plant that helps balance the stress response. Holy Basil may lift the spirits while increasing clarity of thought. A nice tea to drink in a blend with other herbs or on its own.

Horsetail (Equisetum arvenses) aerial parts - a fun plant to grow because it kind of looks like horse tails (without the hair), growing through the earth in gentle spikes. Horsetail is a nice herb to support connective tissue as it is a rich source of vegetal silica and is used to improve skin health, nail strength, and urinary tract health.

Hyssop (Anise Hyssop) aerial parts while in flower – a lovely purple spike of a flower, hyssop attracts butterflies, hummingbirds and honeybees for its pollen. Hyssop makes a nice tea useful for supporting digestion, soothing lower respiratory tract irritation, and helping with fever management.

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Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia) aerial parts – beautiful and fragrant, Lavender is highly aromatic and a useful support for the nervous system, especially where there is melancholy. Lavender is also used for pain relief and skin health.

Lemon Balm (Melissa officinalis) leaves – prolific growing plant in full sun – you may want to put Lemon Balm in a container or contain it somehow. The leaves are a vibrant green, and when pressed, smell divinely like lemon. Rich in essential oils, lemon balm makes a delightful tea, and is nice for uplifting one's mood. Lemon Balm also has anti-viral properties due to the aromatic oils and is used to strengthen the immune system.

Lemon Verbena (Alysia triphylla) leaves – very high in volatile oils, Lemon Verbena smells deliciously of lemon and is a delightful annual to grow in the garden and will reward you with teas through the summer. Lemon Verbena is used as a calming digestive and sleep herb, and would be great sipping while swinging in the hammock.

Motherwort (Leonurus cardiaca) aerial parts – with small whorls of lavender flowers from mid-to-late summer, Motherwort is a pleasant addition to the tea garden and tolerates both sun and shade. Motherwort can be harvested from spring through fall, and is used to support digestive and heart health. Motherwort is a calming herb.

Mugwort (Artemisia vulgaris) aerial parts – Mugwort or Cronewort has spikes of whitish green flowers with deep purple steps and green leaves with silvery undersides. Mugwort is used often for menopause symptoms and digestive support.

Passionflower (Passiflora incarnate) aerial parts – an incredibly beautiful, unusual vine, passionflower will reward you with her spectacular beauty and medicinal value. Passionflower is a useful nervine herb, with mild sedative effects, making it a useful tea to relax after a long day or before bedtime.

Skullcap (Scutellaria lateriflora) flowering aerial parts – the little blue flowers of Skullcap resemble little skulls wearing hats, thus the name of the herb. Skullcap prefers a well-drained moist soil and is quite a useful nervine herb used to soothe frayed nerves, irritability and anxiety.

Yarrow (Achillea millefolium) aerial parts – with lacy textured leaves and little white flowers, yarrow is an important medicinal plant, useful for respiratory conditions, gut health & muscle aches.

Hopefully these ideas for an herbal tea garden will spark a lifelong interest in growing your own herbs. Herbs are lovely to grow in the garden, not only for their beauty, but also for their value in supporting health. Happy growing and peaceful sipping.

<u>Resources</u>

Growing 101 Herbs That Heal by Tammi Hartung (2000)
Herbal Tea Gardens by Marietta Marcin (1999)

(Liz Bartlett is a Clinical Herbalist (www.joyofherbs.net) and Master Gardener for Frederick County.)

For more information about horticulture or the Master Gardener Program in Frederick County, call the Frederick County Office of the Maryland Cooperative Extension, 301- 600-1596, or visit http://www.frederick.umd.edu/. Our mission is to educate Maryland residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes and communities.