



Herbs in the Landscape

Elizabeth Bartlett, Special to News Post

Herbs in the garden landscape offer beauty, fragrance, color, texture, taste and good health. Herbs are quite diverse as they add a richness and depth to a myriad of foods and beverages, are useful as bouquets, sachets, wonderful in teas, salves, oils, vinegars, and a multitude of medicines. Herbs have a colorful history, with humans and animals using herbs for food, medicine and beauty since the beginning of time. The modern garden would be remiss without the addition of at least a few herbs. Many herbs have the added benefit of being drought tolerant, as many originated in the dry, hot, sunny Mediterranean region.



You can design and create herb gardens with plants chosen for specific themes or any combination thereof; some to consider include fragrance gardens, choosing herbs for their alluring aroma; tea gardens, growing herbs that are tasty and healthy as herbal teas; relaxation gardens, opting for herbs that soothe by sight, smell, taste, or their direct effects on the body; moon gardens, picking herbs with colors that reflect the moon light, like those with white flowers and silver/gray leaves; kitchen gardens, choosing herbs to be used in cooking and baking, to name a few. You can also grow herb gardens in a variety of containers on your porch or deck, interspersed in your existing beds, planted between stepping stones (so that when you step on the plants, they release some of their lovely scent). You are only limited by your creativity and imagination. Read some books on growing herbs (see below for some suggestions) to provide insight on what would grow best for you, based on your needs, location (sun, shade, wind, moisture), soil, traffic, etc.

When planning an herb garden, add structure and interest with benches to sit and enjoy your garden, enclosures to add dimension and sense of a secret garden (a stone wall, small fence, herbal hedge, trellis), walkways and walk-throughs (stepping stones, archway, trellis, arbor) and whimsical focal points (statuette, birdbath, glass reflection ball, sundial, urn).



Think about seasonal growth and interest, height, color, texture, shape, aroma. For year-round interest and depth, you'll want to add anchor plants that offer color, texture, and other gifts in the winter months. Plants to consider for year-round color are compact conifers (no higher than 6 feet), plants that produce colorful berries, small trees, shrubs, and plants with interesting bark, and various grasses. To add height to your landscape, in addition to small trees and shrubs, consider adding a vine climbing over a trellis or arbor.

Adding neutral colored plants help unify the various colors of the herbal landscape. Plants with grayish foliage have a cooling effect on the garden, and silvery plants help to illuminate neighboring plants, making other colors more vibrant.

The following are some suggestions on what to grow over, under, and through your various structures and anchor plants. Many herbs have multiple qualities and are both colorful and fragrant, for example. All of these plants do well in our planting zone and hopefully will provide many years of gardening pleasure and bounty. Herbs are versatile, beautiful and give us so much that they are worth any gardeners' consideration in the garden.

Grey/Silver herbs:

Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) - silvery undersided, lanceolate leaves

Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) - silvery-gray, finely indented leaves

Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) - luminous finely-cut, gray foliage with lavender flowers

Gray Santolina (*Santolina* spp.) - aromatic silver-gray foliage with yellow flowers

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) - greenish gray, oval, rough textured leaves

Pinks (*Dianthus* spp.) - foliage is lance-shaped and blue-gray with pink, fragrant, edible flowers

Colorful herbs:

Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*) - showy bright red flowers with purplish bracts that attract butterflies and hummingbirds

Lavender (*Lavendula* spp.) - fragrant beautiful little purple flowers and leaves, color varies by species

Purple Cone Flower (*Echinacea* spp.) - pretty purple petals with bright yellow centers in a cone shape

Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*) - 3 lobed leaves with pinkish flowers in whorls in axils

Borage (*Borago officinalis*) - pretty starry blue flowers

Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*) - bright yellow and orange flowers that also repel insects

St. Johns wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) - bright yellow flowers

White herbs

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) - small, creamy white umbels with finely feathered leaves

Garlic Chives (*Allium tuberosum*) - white, star-shaped flowers

Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) - small, white daisy-like flowers

Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) - white to pale pink flowers in tight clusters on pinnate leaves

Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) - serrated leaflets with white/light yellow sweetly aromatic flowers in dense clusters

Fragrant and tasty herbs

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) - lovely lemony scent to leaves, prolific grower

Lemon verbena (*Aloysia triphylla*) - strong, delicious lemony scent to leaves Geraniums spp. – many varieties with interesting scents

Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*) - fast grower and prolific - strong scent and taste of mint

Anise hyssop (*Agastache* spp.) - fragrant foliage with spiked purple flowers and scent of anise

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) - different varieties ranging in different colored foliage

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) - narrow, fragrant needle-like leaves with tiny pale blue/lavender flowers

Tall or climbing herbs

Marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*) - soft, downy leaves and pale pink flowers in summer

Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) - vine with haunting, large purple flowers pollinated by bats
Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) - rough-prickly, twining vine with interesting fruit of strobiles
Rose (*Rosa* spp) - climbing variety, showy, aromatic flowers with a variety of colors and varying scents
Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) - feathery leaves with flat umbels of yellow flowers.
Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) - shiny green, feathery leaves with yellow flowers in umbrella-shaped clusters

Short or creeping herbs

Thyme (*Thymus* spp.) - fragrant small leaves and flowers, variety of scents and sizes, nice to plant creeping thyme between walking stones
Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*) - glossy leaves with red berries
Violet (*Viola odorata*) - toothed, heart-shaped leaves with drooping, purple or white flowers

Sources

Growing 101 Herbs that Heal by Tammi Hartung (2000)

Practical Herb Garden by Jessica Houdret (2003)

Herbal Tea Gardens by Marietta Marcin (1999)

Landscaping with Herbs by James Adams (1987)

Eastern/Central Medicinal Plants and Herbs by Steven Foster and James Duke (2000)

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