

SUMMER AROMAS: HERBS AND SPICE AND EVERYTHING NICE

By Maritta Perry Grau, Frederick County Master Gardener, July, 2025

It's summer, and around our house, scented plants seem to pop up everywhere: lavender, rosemary, basil, Russian sage, and spearmint. Many of these plants, especially the herbs, are just steps away from our kitchen door.

Herbs? How are they different from spices? Well, when a recipe calls for "herbs," it is calling for some form of fresh or dried leaves—chopped, ground, crushed—of a small plant (think basil [*Ocimum basilicum*], chives [*Allium schoenoprasum*], dill [*Anethum graveolens*], mint [*Mentum*], rosemary [*Salvia rosmarinus*], sage [*Salvia officinalis*]). Spices, on the other hand, are bits taken from roots, bark, or seeds of larger plants, even trees (think cinnamon [*Cinnamomum verum*], cloves [*Syzygium aromaticum*], garlic [*Allium sativum*], ginger [*Zingiber officinale*], paprika [*Capsicum annuum*]).

Don't have any herbs or spices in your garden, or you want to add more? You're in luck: You can plant many herbs up through August. You just need to know what your zone is (check the USDA Hardiness Zone map) and when the first frost is predicted for that zone. In our mid-Atlantic region, that is usually zone 5 or 6, with a frost date around October 15.

After checking your particular zone and its requirements, you may find that you can plant frequently used herbs, including anise (*Pimpinella anisum*), basil, chives, fennel, lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*), marjoram (*Origanum majorana*), oregano (*Origanum vulgare*), and tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*), among others. Many of these can even be grown indoors in the fall.

Your herbs will probably want at least four hours of sun but perhaps some shade in the hottest part of the day. Check the University of Maryland Extension website for information about growing herbs and spices in the mid-Atlantic. And as we noted in our June article on taking care of your lawn, water your new herbs carefully.

Joi Vogin, Licensed Dietitian Nutritionist and Family and Consumer Sciences Agent for the UM Extension, Frederick County, suggests that you store dried herbs and spices in "airtight glass containers... in a cool, dark, dry place like a cabinet or drawer." Fresh herbs can be rinsed, patted dry, and kept in the fridge (except basil) for about 4 to 7 days. Joi says that "Herb-infused oils should be kept in the refrigerator and used within 3–4 days to prevent growth of harmful bacteria." Herbal oils can be kept longer when frozen in ice cube trays or similar mini-containers.

Joi advises that if you're doubling a recipe, add herbs and spices in small amounts, not doubling them, until you achieve the taste you want, as the flavor of some herbs, such as peppers and chilies, gets more intense during cooking.



Lavender:

A two-year-old French lavender plant is beginning to overlap the sidewalk in the author's front garden. Its subtle, soothing scent releases quickly into the air at the slightest touch. It prefers fast-draining, nutrient-poor, alkaline soil and thrives in hot, dry, sunny locations, like this southwest-facing garden. *(Photo courtesy of the author)*

Rosemary:

This rosemary sits in a pot filled with coleus, dwarf zinnia, and creeping jenny. As the columnar rosemary grows, it will dominate the plantings, and is conveniently located whenever anyone needs some fresh rosemary to add to cooking. The owners often brush by the rosemary, releasing its spicy aroma as they go in and out of the house. *(Photo courtesy of the author)*



Thyme:

Thyme is spreading in a thick mat at the edge of a kitchen garden, which holds a mix of herbs and flowers. Like the rosemary in a previous picture, it is just steps away when some thyme is needed for cooking. *(Photo courtesy of the author)*

Herb Spiral:

Frederick County Master Gardeners have 25 or more beds in the demonstration gardens behind the University of Maryland Extension Services building at 330 Montevue Lane, Frederick. Each year, MG interns provide innovative garden projects. Here, a garden made in a vertical spiral form showcases various herbs. It's a great project for anyone who doesn't have much gardening space. *(Photo courtesy of Frederick County Master Gardeners)*



Visit the Frederick County Master Gardeners headquarters at the UM Extension Office, 330 Montevue Lane, Frederick, [301-600-1596](tel:301-600-1596). There, you can get lots of information on herbs, as well as many other gardening subjects. You can also go to the UM Extension Program's website for a video on herb gardening ("Introduction to Herb Gardening"), as well as other information to help you in growing and preserving the herbs and spices in your garden.

- Get print brochures and other publications (some in Spanish).
- Check our website for upcoming seminars, Master Gardener certification classes, or other announcements at bit.ly/FCMG-Home-Gardening.
- Check out our herb spiral in the Demonstration Gardens behind the UMD Extension Service Building!
- On the first Wednesday of each month, May through October, at 10:00 a.m., weather permitting, we have a Children's Storytime in the Garden. A master gardener reads a story to the children, and follows up with story-related activities.

Even more gardening information and advice are available to you online at the UM Extension Home & Garden Information Center, bit.ly/UME-HGIC; Frederick County Master Gardeners Publications, <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening>; Facebook, <https://bit.ly/FCMGFacebook>; or Instagram, <https://bit.ly/FCMGinstagram>.

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