

## GROW YOUR OWN HERBS

### Part 2

Dig in and join the growing number of Irish people who are taking to the soil to nourish their souls. Forget about paying lavish prices for easy to grow foods and starting with herbs is an easy introduction to living the good life!

Home grown herbs taste better and cost less than buying in shops and whether you have a garden, patio, balcony or window box you can grow a great variety of herbs easily and successfully.

Basil, Dill and Coriander are amongst the most popular herbs grown in the garden. If you use a lot of them it is very much worth growing your own. Parsley and Tarragon are two of the favourite herbs in the kitchen and they are perfect with fish. **Lemongrass** and **Verbena** are great for flavouring Thai style foods and lemon tea whilst **Chives**, **Mint** and **Fennel** are three of the easiest herbs to grow in the garden. Thyme and Oregano add fantastic flavours to Mediterranean style dishes and **Bay**, **Sage** and **Rosemary** compliment all meat dishes.

Here we give you great tips on how to grow, care and harvest 8 of the most popular herbs, and last month we will brought you part 1 with 7 more herbs that you can easily grow and harvest...

[Download Part 1 Now >>>](#)



### Bay



Bay adds wonderful flavour to your soups and stews

### How to grow Bay

Bay tolerates both sun and shade, and will grow in any soil providing it isn't too wet. Position in a sheltered spot as the leaves can be scorched by cold winds.

Bay is an ideal container plant - it's only moderately hardy, so growing it in a pot makes for easier winter protection. You can buy new plants in late spring and plant into containers in May.

#### **How to care for Bay**

Clip the plants into shape if necessary in June to July. In autumn, protect the rootball of container-grown trees by moving the pot into the **greenhouse** or conservatory, or by wrapping the pot in bubble wrap and hessian.

#### **How to harvest Bay**

Fresh Bay leaves have a stronger flavour than dried ones and although Bay leaves are available all year round, it's a good idea to pick and dry some leaves in August for use in winter.

You can dry the leaves between the pages of an old paperback weighted down under a stack of books. This will stop the leaves from curling as they dry and will therefore make them easier to store.

#### **Recommended varieties**

The normal species of Bay (*Laurus nobilis*) is the only one used for culinary purposes.

### **Rosemary**



Rosemary is ideal for growing in patio pots

#### **How to grow Rosemary**

Rosemary is widely available as established plants in garden centres for planting in spring. For more plants, take cuttings from young shoots in spring or summer. Rosemary can be used as a low hedge.

#### **How to care for Rosemary**

Rosemary is slightly tender and needs a sunny, sheltered position in well-drained soil; it does well in chalky soils. If growing Rosemary in a container, add some grit to the compost to aid drainage and don't over water. After flowering in March, trim into shape and feed.

#### **How to harvest Rosemary**

You can pick leaves from this evergreen all year round. It's a good idea to dry some leaves at the end of summer if you want to use lots of Rosemary over the winter, or add a sprig to olive oil for salad dressings.

#### **Recommended varieties**

The Common Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is the hardiest form and most used in cooking. 'Miss Jessopp's Upright' is a more vigorous and upright variety and makes a good focal point in a herb bed.

The Prostratus Group are low-growing forms ideal for the top of a wall or rock garden. Corsican Rosemary has a more pungent scent.

## Sage



### How to grow Purple-leaved Sage

There's a wide variety of plain green and coloured-leaved Sages available in garden centres. Alternatively, you can take cuttings in late spring or early summer. All varieties will root easily in about four weeks.

### How to care for Sage

Sage needs well-drained fertile soil in a sunny spot. If your soil is a little heavy, dig in some grit before planting. Alternatively, Sage will grow well in a container; again add grit to the compost to improve the drainage.

Cut plants back hard in March to about 15cm above ground level to prevent them becoming leggy. If you've got an old straggly plant, it's best to get rid of it and replace it with a new one.

### How to harvest Sage

Fresh leaves can be picked any time before flowering. In theory, you should be able to pick leaves all year round, as Sage is evergreen, but the leaves can suffer in cold winters. It's best to harvest in summer and dry for winter use.

You can mix chopped Sage and onions into sausage meat for a great tasting stuffing!

## Lemongrass



### How to grow Tropical grass with strong lemon flavour

Lemongrass can be grown from seed sown from late January to March.

As it's a tropical plant, the seed needs heat to germinate so you need to sow it in a heated propagator. Transplant the seedlings when they are large enough to handle and grow them on in the greenhouse or on the kitchen windowsill.

Lemongrass is readily available nowadays in most large supermarkets as cut stems. Providing the stem is fresh and the base hasn't been over-trimmed, you can get it to root in a jar of water before potting it up.

### How to care for Lemongrass

Keep your Lemongrass well watered in summer and give it a liquid feed every now and then. Keep it just moist in winter and ensure you don't over water. Lemongrass fares best if grown permanently in a container in the greenhouse or on a sunny windowsill.

### How to harvest Lemongrass

Cut off one stem close to the root and use 10-12 cm of the stalk starting from the base and discarding the

outer leaves.

### **Recommended varieties**

Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) doesn't have any named varieties so go for the plain type as either plants or - if you're feeling adventurous - seed.



### **How to grow Lemon Verbena**

Lemon Verbena is best in a pot

Lemon Verbena is a small, attractive shrub but it loses its leaves in winter. Because it can't withstand frost and therefore needs protection throughout the winter, it's best to keep it as a container plant.

You can buy established plants from the garden centre or you can grow your own from cuttings. Take softwood cuttings from new growth in spring or more mature shoots in late summer or early autumn.

Push the cuttings into a mix of compost and grit, transferring into larger pots once they've rooted.

### **How to care for lemon Verbena**

A warm humid spot in light free draining soil, such as against a sunny wall is ideal.

Prune it lightly in spring and remove any dead tips once your plant starts to reshoot, this will encourage new growth.

Cut plants back in autumn to keep a compact shape and move them under cover to protect from frosts.

### **How to harvest lemon Verbena**

You should pick fresh leaves whilst the plant is in full growth, they make a refreshing tea and can be used to flavour cakes and ice cream.

Drying the leaves concentrates their flavour and dried leaves should be store in an airtight container.

## **Chives**



Chives are a kitchen essentials and perfect for omelettes and salad

### **How to grow Chives**

Chives are simple to grow and perfect for pots. Sow seed in March to April direct into the ground or in containers, or buy plants from the garden centre.

### **How to care for Chives**

Chives like a rich, moist soil in a fairly sunny position. Ensure pot-grown plants are well-watered so they produce fresh leaves. The pompom flowers produced in summer are also edible and look wonderful in a salad bowl.

Chives die right back in winter but you can keep a supply going by potting some up in September to grow on a sunny windowsill. Rejuvenate plants by dividing them every three or four years.

### **How to harvest Chives**

Cut Chive leaves with sharp scissors about 1cm from ground level. Add Chives at the end of cooking or their flavour will disappear.

### **Recommended varieties**

The normal species (*Allium schoenoprasum*) has mauve flowers, although you can find white-flowered varieties. 'Forescate' is a more vigorous variety with bright pink flowers.

## **Fennel**



Bronze-leaved common Fennel

### **How to grow Fennel**

Fennel soon reaches 1.5m high, so you'll only want one or two plants. The best bet is to buy them or get young plants from a friend or neighbour who already has Fennel and it self-seeds readily.

### **How to care for Fennel**

Fennel likes a moist but well-drained soil that's deep enough for its long tap root. Flat heads of tiny yellow flowers appear in summer, remove these before they shed their seeds to prevent them self-seeding and you can collect them for use in the kitchen.

Cut down the dead stems in early spring as the new growth starts to appear. Its best to divide Fennel every three to four years.

### **How to harvest Fennel**

You can pick the feathery young leaves and young stems as required. Collect the ripe seeds in late summer for flavouring sauces, bread and fish dishes.

### **Recommended varieties**

The green-leaved form is the Garden or common Fennel. For an alternative, try bronze Fennel with brown/purple, feathery leaves that are very attractive in the border and just as tasty in the kitchen.

## **Mint**



Mint for adding flavour to potatoes, peas and Pimms...

### **How to grow Mint**

Mint grown from seed will rarely be the same as the parent plant, so the only way to get your favourite Mint is to buy established plants, garden centre's usually have a good supply in spring. Or try scrounging a cutting from a friend as the shoots will root easily in water.

All Mints are invasive to some degree, spreading via underground stems. This makes them ideal for growing in containers.

Mints should be renewed every two to three years to keep them vigorous. Lift the plant in spring, save some of the pale, young, underground stems with lots of buds and replant them. Throw the rest away.

### **How to care for Mint**

Mint prefers moist soil and light sun to shade. Keep it well-watered and remove the flowers to stop it self seeding. Feed with a weak liquid fertiliser.

For a supply of fresh mint in winter, take sections of root from the parent plant in October and lay them on the surface of fresh compost in a new pot. Cover lightly with compost, water and place in the **greenhouse**, conservatory or on the kitchen windowsill. Fresh shoots will sprout within a few weeks.

### **How to harvest Mint**

Pick fresh mint leaves throughout the growing season. Pick leaves before flowering and freeze them, either whole or chopped, in airtight containers.

### **Recommended varieties**

Spearmint (*Mentha Spicata*) is the familiar mint with long, pointed leaves and a refreshing flavour.

For food, teas and salads choose Moroccan and Tashkent Mints.

Apple Mint has a mild mint flavour and apple-scented, woolly leaves. Pineapple mint has pretty, cream-streaked leaves and can also be used in cooking; and finally black peppermint, which has a strong minty taste, is ideal for flavouring food and for mint tea.