



Magic Garden Nursery & Landscape
7909 E 22nd Street Tucson, AZ 85710
(520) 885-7466
www.magicgardennursery.com

Growing and Using Herbs for Thanksgiving (Recipes Included)©

By Marisa Gray

Every year at Thanksgiving time, many people scramble to try and find fresh herbs to use for their Thanksgiving recipes. You find them in the store, in those little plastic clamshells, kind of dry and wilted. The volatile oils have deteriorated, and while they taste better than the dried version, you are not getting the best flavor. Growing fresh herbs is so easy, why not do it yourself this year?

We're going to separate them into growing groups. Certain herbs enjoy like growing conditions, and you will save time and have more successful plants if you either grow them in these groups or by themselves. You can plant them together in a large pot, individually in smaller pots, or prepare a section of your garden for herbs.

Most herbs grow quickly, so if you decide to plant in containers, be sure to give them plenty of room to spread out. If herbs become pot-bound, you may find that they require more water. If this happens, you should re-pot them into a larger container.

Low Water Sun-Loving Herbs

Bay Laurel, Chives, Marjoram, Oregano, Rosemary, Sage and Thyme prefer well-draining soil and will do well with less water and lots of sunshine. If you have a sunroom or sunny window in your home, you can even grow them indoors. All potted plants will require more water than plants in the ground.

Bay Laurel will grow into a large tree which does well when grown outdoors in the Tucson area. It is a moderately slow growing, so you can grow it in a pot for some time

Chives prefer to be grown by themselves, and will spread into a larger clump each year. Chives are sensitive to the low light conditions of winter (especially after the Winter Solstice), and as the days get shorter, growth slows down dramatically.

Marjoram and Oregano are close members of the same family. If you plant them together, you may notice that the flavor will become more similar in both due to cross-pollination. You probably want to avoid this. They are also both vigorous spreaders, so give them plenty of room. Marjoram grows exceptionally well with most other plants, helping to improve growth and flavor.

Rosemary, both upright and trailing, grows extremely well in the Tucson area. It is great in pots and also makes an attractive landscape plant. Once established, it requires very little water or attention. Rosemary and Sage make good companions if planted together.

Sage comes in many different varieties. Garden Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) has the strongest flavor, traditionally associated with Thanksgiving recipes. The difference in flavor is fairly negligible between the other varieties (Purple, Golden, etc.), so you may choose to plant them for color or growth habit as well as cooking.

Thyme grows well with any of the other sun-lovers. It has a tendency to spread, so again, you need to give it lots of room. There are several varieties good for cooking, Common Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) being the traditional cooking thyme. Lemon thyme is also wonderful for cooking, with a strong lemon scent and mild flavor.

Moisture Loving Semi-Shade Herbs

Basil, Cilantro/Coriander, Dill, Mint and Parsley are all moisture lovers. They want at least 6 hours of sunshine daily, but may need protection from afternoon sun in the summer and fall.

Basil and Dill need protection from winter cold, anything below 40 degrees is a killer cold. Grow these two in pots that can be moved indoors when the cold comes. A nice sunny window will help them grow big and bountiful.

Cilantro loves the outdoors, as long as the temperature remains cool. When the weather heats up, Cilantro wants to bolt! Bolting means the plant tries to send up a flower stalk and make seed. In the case of Cilantro, this is not necessarily a bad thing, as the seeds are Coriander! You really get your money's worth out of this helpful plant. You can also save the seeds for next season's planting.

Mint loves water. If you plant it outside near a hose bib, under a dripping swamp cooler, or anywhere else moisture collects, mint will not only thrive, but it might just take over! If you want to keep mint under control, plant it in a pot. Mint is another plant that comes in many varieties from one large family, so be careful of the cross-pollination and mixture of flavors and plant them in separate pots. Chocolate-Spear Mint might sound good in theory, but in practice, it's not really that tasty. Some interesting mints to try are Apple Mint, Orange Mint, Chocolate Mint or Pineapple Mint if you are looking for something new. You can also stick with the classics: Peppermint, Spearmint, Mint Julep or Mojito Mint.

Parsley grows beautifully throughout the year in the Tucson area. It is also a biennial, which means you'll have to re-plant each year, as it goes to flower and seed the second year it's planted. It also attracts the caterpillar of the Black Swallowtail butterfly, so if you let them feed on it, you may see a profusion of butterflies in your yard!

Now that you know what to plant and where, you can get growing! Herbs like plenty of food, so give them a balanced (all-purpose) organic fertilizer regularly. If you are growing in the ground, this means every 6 weeks or so spring through fall. If you are growing in pots, then the amount of water you are using means the nutrients get flushed out more rapidly, so you'll want to fertilize every four weeks or so.

Removing flowers from your herbs as they form helps keep them full and strong. If you allow them to go to flower and then to seed, most herbs think they've done their job and get straggly and/or die.

Harvesting is easy, just go out and snip off what you need! If you have a recipe that calls for dried herbs, the substitution ratio is 3 to 1 fresh to dry. If your recipe calls for 1 teaspoon of dried thyme, for example, you would substitute 3 teaspoons of fresh thyme. Here are a few recipes to get you started on your Thanksgiving feast:

Lavender and Thyme Roast Cornish Hens

Ingredients

- ¾ stick butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon chopped thyme plus extra sprigs for garnish
- ½ teaspoon fresh lemon zest
- Salt & pepper
- 2 teaspoons dried untreated lavender flowers
- Four Cornish hens
- 2 lemons, halved
- ½ cup white wine
- Lavender sprigs for garnish

Preparation

Preheat oven to 475 degrees. Put softened butter in a bowl with 1 teaspoon of chopped fresh thyme. Add the lemon zest, salt and pepper to taste. Crush the lavender flowers in a pestle with a mortar and add to the butter mixture. Mix well, then spoon the mixture onto a piece of wax paper and shape into a four inch log. Chill for at least 30 minutes. Remove from refrigerator when chilled and cut log into 16 slices. Rinse the hens inside and out. Starting at the neck of each bird, gently push four slices under the skin. If necessary, tie the legs together with string and secure the wings to the sides with wooden skewers. Place the birds in a roasting pan, rub with the lemon halves and season well with salt and

pepper. Roast for 30 minutes, remove string and skewers, then keep warm while preparing the gravy. To make the gravy, remove the hens from the roasting pan. Pour the white wine into the pan and stir thoroughly. Transfer the liquid to a small saucepan and skim off any fat. Simmer to reduce liquid to ½ a cup and serve hot with the hens. Serves 4.

Fresh Herb Stuffing

Ingredients

- 12 cups day-old rustic or sourdough with crust cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter
- 3 cups chopped onions
- 2 cups chopped celery
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh sage
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh marjoram
- 2 large eggs
- 1 1/2 teaspoons fine sea salt
- 1 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
- 1 cup (or more) chicken or vegetable broth

Preparation

Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onions and celery. Sauté until vegetables are tender and onions are golden brown, about 10-12 minutes. Add all fresh herbs and sauté about 1 minute.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Put bread cubes on baking sheet(s). Toast bread until it is crusty but not hard, tossing cubes after 5 minutes, toast 10 to 12 minutes total. Remove from oven and let cool.

Butter a 13x9 inch baking dish. Put cooled bread crumbs in a very large mixing bowl. Stir vegetable mixture into bread. Whisk eggs, salt, and pepper in small bowl to blend then whisk in 1 cup broth. Add egg mixture to stuffing, tossing to combine evenly and adding more broth by 1/4 cupfuls if dry. Transfer stuffing into prepared baking dish. Bake stuffing uncovered until cooked through and brown and crusty on top, 50 to 60 minutes. If the top starts to get too dark, you may cover with foil. Remove from oven after baking. Let stand 10 minutes. Serves 4-6.

Roasted Root Vegetables with Fresh Herbs

Ingredients

- 2 pounds of mixed vegetables (new potatoes various colors, carrots, beets, sweet potatoes, turnips)
- 2-3 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 2-3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2-3 sprigs fresh oregano
- 4-5 stems fresh chives
- 2 Tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- Olive Oil
- Salt and Pepper

Preparation

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cut herb sprigs into 4" sections. Top & tail the carrots and chop into 2" lengths. Peel sweet potatoes, beets and turnips. Chop these and new potatoes into cubes. Put all vegetables into a large mixing bowl and toss with olive oil until well-coated. Place either in a roasting pan or wrap in a foil packet with the herb sprigs. You may also add several cloves of crushed garlic if desired. Place in oven and roast for about an hour. If using a roasting pan, toss vegetables two or three times to cook thoroughly. If using foil packet, turn two or three times during baking. Test vegetables with a fork to make sure they are cooked. Remove from oven, place in serving dish. Add balsamic vinegar, salt & pepper to taste. Toss vegetables. Serve immediately. Serves 4-6.

Fresh Herb & Cheese Popovers

Ingredients

- 2 eggs
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup milk
- 1 Tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 Tablespoon chopped fresh oregano
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 Tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

Preparation

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Beat eggs in large bowl. Add flour, pepper and salt, beating until slightly mixed. Gradually beat in the milk until blended and smooth. Stir in oil, oregano and cheese. Thoroughly grease 6-8 ovenproof custard cups (5 oz. size) with softened butter. Place cups on baking sheet and warm in the oven for 2-3 minutes or until butter melts. Remove from oven and fill the cups half full with batter. Bake for 25-30 minutes, or until golden brown. Do not open the oven to peek while they are baking or they will collapse! Remove from oven and let cool slightly before serving.

Fresh Herb Salad with Balsamic Vinaigrette

Ingredients

- 3 quarts mixed baby lettuce, torn into bite-sized pieces
- 1 cup loosely packed arugula
- ½ cup loosely packed dill fronds
- ½ cup loosely packed sweet basil leaves
- ¼ cup thinly sliced scallions
- 1 avocado, sliced thinly
- 1/3 cup slivered almonds

Dressing

- ½ cup virgin olive oil
- ½ cup aged balsamic vinegar
- 3 Tablespoons honey
- Salt & pepper

Preparation

In a large salad bowl, combine the salad greens, herbs, avocado and nuts. In another container (with a lid), combine olive oil, balsamic vinegar, honey, salt and pepper. Stir to mix in honey, then shake thoroughly. Pour over salad and toss to coat. Serves 4-6.

Happy Thanksgiving to all of you and your families! We hope you enjoy the recipes and have learned how much joy there is in growing herbs!