



Diann's Herb Newsletter

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The International Herb Society selects the Herb of the Year. Here are a few from the past plus the new one:

*2008 Calendula
2007 Lemon Balm
2006 Pelargonium
2005 Oregano
2004 Garlic
2003 Basil
2002 Echinacea
2001 Sage
2000 Rosemary*

*Diann's Greenhouse now has a web site:
<http://diannsgreenhouse.com>
Check it out.*



Photo by Diann Nance

Growing Herbs Indoors

Even though the heat and drought are still with us, it will soon be time to bring in herbs for winter use.

An indoor herb garden lets you enjoy the flavor and fragrance of fresh herbs year round. A few pots on your kitchen windowsill will always be at hand to add herbal zest to your cuisine, and to remind you of summertime and the outdoors

Your indoor garden could begin with a modest collection of parsley, chives, and oregano, or you can create imaginative groupings.

Lighting: Most herbs need a lot of direct sunlight each day. An unobstructed south, west, or east window should be fine. A few herbs,

however, such as mint, watercress, and chervil will grow in a bright north window. If your plants are getting long, thin and spindly, it means that they are not getting enough light and they need to be moved to a brighter window. Turn your plants regularly so all sides get even exposure to light. Sometimes plants brought into the new environment of your home will suddenly lose their lower leaves. Do not be alarmed, this is an adjustment to the change in the light intensity. Soon, new growth will appear at the growing tips where light is stronger. Lemon verbena is especially likely to do this.

Temperature and Humidity: Herbs are happy in the normal home environment. Difficulties that arise with herbs indoors are often due to air that is too hot and dry, especially near radiators and or air outlets. To help combat low humidity, place your herbs on a tray of pebbles with is kept filled with water. The bottoms of the pots should not be actually immersed in water, but merely resting on the pebbles, to allow for drainage.

Watering: How quickly a plant dries out depends on humidity, air movement and exposure to sun and will vary with the seasons. Therefore, it is important to check frequently. To determine whether watering is necessary push your finger a half inch below the surface of the soil. If it feels dry, gently pour water into the pot until it runs out of the drainage hole.

Be careful not to over water causing the soil to stay soggy, especially during the winter. Of course, never allow the herbs to dry out completely. Should a plant dry out accidentally, you can often save it by immersing it, pot and all, in water for about an hour.

Fertilizing: Since the nutrients in the pot become exhausted as the plant grows, they should be replenished with weak but regular applications of soluble fertilizer. Apply fertilizer only when plants are actively growing, never during periods of slow growth or dormancy.

Controlling Pests: Although pests rarely infest garden grown herbs, they can be bothersome indoors. This is true because indoor growing conditions are usually less than ideal so plants are less able to resist pests.

Spider mites are the most common pests. They are visible only with the aid of a magnifying glass. They accumulate on the undersides of leaves, and in heavy infestations you can see faint white spots on the leaves and fine webs on the undersides. Insecticidal soap solution sprayed on the undersides of the leaves once a week helps control them.

Plants susceptible to spider mites are lemon verbena, and all members of the mint family, including sage, lemon balm, and catnip.

The whitefly is a small white flying insect about 1/8" long, usually noticed when clouds of them fly up when disturbed. Like the spider mites, they live on the undersides of leaves. Insecticidal soap applied once or twice a week under the leaves controls them. Whiteflies are attracted to bright yellow, so yellow Sticky Strip traps placed near plants will help control whiteflies. They attack the same plants as spider mites.

Aphids are slow-moving soft bodied insects about 1/16" long, usually green, brown, or black, that cling to the soft growing tips of plants. Diatomaceous earth or rotenone applied once or twice a week will control them. Aphids attack basil, coriander, lemon verbena, and parsley.

Occasionally *mealy bugs* and *scale* insects can be a problem. A Q-tip soaked in alcohol can be used to wipe mealy bugs off. Adult scales can be scraped off with a fingernail and the young crawling larvae can be controlled with insecticidal soap.

Another frequent "pest" is the *fungus gnat*. It looks like a brown fruit fly and accumulates at the soil surface. The adult does not feed off plants. The larvae which exist in the soil feed on organic matter in the soil, and occasionally on roots. Usually this insect is more unsightly than harmful to plants. Spray the adults with insecticidal soap regularly.

Harvesting: The joy of growing herbs indoors is having fresh herbs always at your fingertips. Most herbs put on new growth at the branch tips, and this is where they should be snipped to encourage bushier growth. Some herbs such as chives and parsley grow from the base, so use the older, outside leaves first. Remember to take care not to harvest too much, particularly during the slow winter season.



Photo by Dianth Mance

Pick herbs early in the day, just after the dew dries. They will be juicier, more aromatic and more nutritious. Always snip with scissors.

Recipes

The salad dressing recipes are included by special request from the GEMS, those Glowing Examples of Modern Seniors with whom I spend many entertaining, enlightening, and exercising hours.

Red Wine-Basil Vinaigrette

½ cup red wine vinegar
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1 cup light olive oil
½ cup loosely packed, fresh **basil** leaves, chiffonade
½ cup chopped fresh **flat-leaf parsley**

Combine first 4 ingredients in a food processor. Add oil in a slow, steady stream until well blended. Add basil and parsley. If you would like smaller pieces of herbs, pulse the food processor a couple of times.
Yield: 2 cups

Blue Cheese Dressing

1 cup real mayonnaise
¼ cup real sour cream
2/3 cup crumbled blue cheese
1 ½ teaspoons fresh lemon juice
Dash cayenne pepper
½ teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon fresh-ground black pepper
1 ½ tablespoons chopped fresh savory herbs (**parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme, and/or oregano**)

In a mixing bowl, combine all ingredients except herbs. When well mixed, blend in herbs. Refrigerate several hours, stirring just before serving. Will keep for up to 4 days. Makes about 3 cups.

--Recipes adapted from *The Year of the Herb Cookbook* by The Pine Island Garden Club

How to dry herbs...

Gently wash the herbs and pat dry with paper towels. Tie two or three stalks together. Hang upside down in an airy, dry spot. (Attics are great.) Herbs will be dry in one to two weeks under favorable conditions.

When herbs are dry and crumbly, remove the leaves from the stems. Pack in airtight containers or zip-top bags with air squeezed out.

Don't crush the leaves until you're ready to use them.

Herb term:
Chiffonade

To tightly roll leaves together, like a cigar, and slice into ribbons.

Let dried herbs soak in salad dressing for 10 minutes to an hour before tossing with your greens.