



Diann's Herb Newsletter

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The International Herb Association selects the Herb of the Year (HOY). Here is a list of the ones starting from the beginning of the 21st century:

2016

Capsicum

2015 Savory
2014 Artemisia
2013 Elder
2012 Rose
2011 Horseradish
2010 Dill
2009 Bay Laurel
2008 Calendula
2007 Lemon Balm
2006 Pelargonium
2005 Oregano
2004 Garlic
2003 Basil
2002 Echinacea
2001 Sage
2000 Rosemary

Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

Growing Your Own Herbs from Seed

If you haven't started your own seeds, this might be the year to enjoy one of the most exciting things about gardening. These tips will help you get more out of the rewarding experience of growing your own plants.

Timing is very important. Seed packets will give you a great deal of information like "days to germination" and "days to maturity." Whether you're planting outside or inside, it's important to know the last frost date for your region. Here in Middle Tennessee in 2016 the average last frost date is April 10, which means we can be reasonably sure that there will not be a frost after April 22. Use that information to decide when to start your seeds cross-referencing with the seed packet.

Choose seeds from reputable companies and for the current growing season. Old seeds will possibly not germinate well. There are ways to check the germinating quality of old seeds, but if you're new to starting seeds, stick with fresh seeds.

Containers are important if you plan to start seeds inside early. There is a wide array of seed starter kits to choose from. Most contain individual cells that you can fill with growing media. Others require the insertion of removable cells, pellets, or small pots, often made of peat moss, which you purchase individually. Some propagators come with an extra bottom tray that contains a water reservoir. This is a great feature because it allows you to water your young herbs from the bottom. You can even make your own pots from old newspapers. I do not recommend styrofoam cups.

Germinating mix, which is soilless and made up of peat, vermiculate, and/or perlite, is recommended for starting seeds. Skip the garden soil for starting seedlings; it is generally too heavy in texture and will compact easily.

Pre-treatments of seeds will ensure optimum germination of many seeds. Seeds with hard seed coats, like nasturtium, morning glory, and licorice, will need scarification (scuffing with sandpaper or a knife, or you can soak the seeds for 24 hours). Other herbs may perform better with a period of pre-chilling, called stratification. The idea here is to mimic winter conditions, so mix the seeds with moistened sand or damp paper towel and place in a plastic bag and leave in the refrigerator for several months. Anise, hyssop, betony, lavender, sage, goldenseal, vervain, and sweet cicely will benefit from stratification.

Sow seeds carefully. Moisten the growing medium. Sow the seeds by hand or use a seeder. Each seed needs to be in direct contact with the growing media. Most seeds like to be covered about the width of



the seeds. Some seeds need light to germinate, so don't cover them. Use a clear plastic cover or use clear plastic wrap to keep moisture in. Be sure to uncover once plants come up. Remember to label your seeds with names and the dates planted.

Soil temperature is vital to germination. A soil temperature of 72 degrees or above is adequate, so if you're starting seeds in your home, you're probably safe. However, if you're starting them in a basement, it's best to use a propagation mat, which usually has a thermostat. Some people have success placing the seeded pots on top of the refrigerator for warmth. Some seeds, such as chervil, chives, cilantro, and parsley, will germinate at a slightly cooler temperature. Once you see the seedlings, remove the plants from the heat mats, so they can adjust to the slightly cooler room temperature.



Air circulation is important for your seedlings. Poor circulation may contribute to root rot and encourage fungal disease. A little movement of air also helps the plants to grow stronger stems.

Light is important at the seedling stage. Provide up to six (6) hours of indirect sun each day. Grow lights may be used. Be careful about placing seedlings in a window because the intensified sunlight may cause scorching of the leaves. Don't overheat the plants; it's better to have slightly cooler air temperatures rather than warmer.

Water wisely. The extremes of too dry or too wet can have detrimental results. It's best to water from the bottom, if possible. Misting with a spray bottle works well also. Check for dryness every day.

Fertilize with care. Seeds store adequate food for germination and initial growth, so there's no need to fertilize newly sown seeds. When the plants have grown their first or second set of true leaves, begin giving light applications of liquid fertilizer weekly. Don't over-fertilize. Too much fertilizer can prove fatal to your plants. It's better to err on the side of too little.

Transplant once your seedlings have produced a couple sets of true leaves and are obviously outgrowing their cells or pots. If too many seedlings grow in one pot, you'll need to remove one or several of them to allow room to grow. You can trim them at the base with a pair of sharp kitchen scissors. Toss the trimmed edible seedlings in your salad or sandwich. You may also separate the seedlings; however, that will disturb the roots and slow down growth for a while. Be very careful handling seedlings; the stems are very vulnerable. As soon as possible start "hardening off" the plants by allowing them time outside during the day, increasing the time each day. If there is a frost predicted or if there's a heavy rain, be sure to take the plants in. Some plants don't like to be transplanted, i.e., borage, cilantro, and dill.

All this may sound a little overwhelming, but you'd be surprised how quickly you'll learn to monitor your seedlings. With a little extra work, you'll reap a bountiful harvest. And you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you've grown the herbs yourself.

Source: Sheryl Normandeau, "Spring Seed Starting," *Herb Quarterly*, Spring, 2016

*It's spring fever.
That is what the
name of it is. And
when you've got it,
you want—oh, you
don't quite know
what it is you do
want, but it just
fairly makes your
heart ache, you
want it so!*

--Mark Twain

Recipes

Quick Breads

When you don't have much time, but you would like something special for entertaining, here are some simple quick bread recipes.

Quick Herbed Loaf

1 loaf French bread
½ pound butter, softened
1 Tablespoon chopped parsley
1 teaspoon minced chives
1 teaspoon chopped tarragon
1 teaspoon chopped basil
1 teaspoon minced savory

Cut bread into 1-inch thick slices not cutting entirely through bottom crust. Combine butter and herbs until well-mixed and smooth. Cover one side of each slice of bread completely with the herbed butter. Wrap the loaf of bread in foil. Do not completely close top. Bake 10 minutes in oven preheated to 450 degrees, Yields 1 loaf. (Note: You may substitute herbs of your choice.)

Mixed-Herb Crescents

16 ounces refrigerated crescent dinner rolls
1 teaspoon dried, crushed oregano
1 teaspoon dried, crushed parsley
½ teaspoon dried, crushed basil
4 Tablespoons butter, melted

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Separate rolls into 16 triangles. In small bowl, combine herbs and add butter. Mix well. Brush herb mixture onto each triangle using a pastry brush. Roll each piece into a crescent, beginning the roll from the wide end. Place on greased cookie sheet and bake for 10 to 12 minutes or until golden brown. Yields 16 crescents.

Toasted Herb Sticks

½ cup butter
¼ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon fresh thyme
Dash of pepper
1 Tablespoon lemon juice
1 teaspoon chopped parsley
1 small clove of garlic, minced
1 teaspoon minced chives
12 slices day-old loaf bread

Place all ingredients, except bread, in a small skillet and heat slowly. Mix well. You may trim crusts from bread (I like the crusts.) and cut bread into 3 sections. Dip each side in (or brush each side with) the heated mixture. Do not soak. Place on a baking sheet and put into a 350 degree preheated oven. Turn after 10 minutes and bake 5 minutes more or until golden brown. Serve warm with soup or salad. Serves 6.

--Recipes from Carol Asher, *Especially Herbs*, 1994

I want to do to you
what spring does
with the cherry
trees.

--Pablo Nerudo

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