



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Leader Training Guide

Preparation for Spring Herb Garden

Objectives:

- Learn the basics of planting and caring for an herb garden.
- Enjoy the herbs.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

A little sprinkle of fresh herbs on a meal can mean the difference between flavors that are just nice, and flavors that are *just spectacular*. And when you have fresh herbs growing in your own backyard, porch planters, or window box, this makes it even easier to boost the flavor of your homemade meals. Starting an herb garden so you can have your own fresh supply of these aromatics is the perfect gardening project for spring.

Lesson:

Select Your Space

Whether you live in a subdivision with a large backyard or an apartment with a balcony, herbs grow well about anywhere that receives at least 6 hours of sunlight. Do not despair if the only spots you must grow are a bit shady, though. Some herbs, such as cilantro, parsley, and mint, do just fine with 3 or 4 hours of sunlight. Check the plant tag for light requirements. You will also want to have a water source nearby.

If possible, select a site near the kitchen so you can quickly snip a handful of oregano while making pasta sauce, or pluck a few basil leaves for bruschetta. Also, place your herb garden where you will see it. Not only will that inspire you to add interesting flavors to your meals, but you will also be more likely to notice when your plants need watering or if pests invade.

If your yard offers rich, well-draining soil in a sunny space free from competing trees and shrubs, planting an herb garden in the ground should work beautifully. However, if your soil is less than ideal, a raised bed garden is an excellent alternative. Fill it with Miracle-Gro® Raised Bed Soil or a similar product, which is just the right texture and weight for that kind of growing space. If your garden soil does not drain well, you can amend it – or consider going with raised beds or containers instead of putting your herbs directly into the ground.

Most herbs prefer soil that has organic matter such as **compost** incorporated into it, and a slightly acidic to **neutral pH between 6.0 and 7.0**.

Pick Your Plants

You need to read about the herbs to see which ones are compatible to grow together.

Make a list of the flavors you enjoy, as well as what you would like to do with your herbs. If cooking is your hobby, add herbs that make up classic culinary collections, like Herbes de Provence (rosemary, marjoram, thyme, oregano, and savory). Love making crafts? Add lavender to your herb garden to dry for sachets and wreaths.

Plant Your Herb Garden

Now it is time to plant your herbs! Look at the plant tag or check the Homegrown app to learn how much space to leave between each plant for the best growth and good airflow. Dig a hole, then plant the herb to the same depth as it was in its original container. Fill in around the plant, gently pat down the soil, then water well. A word of caution: With any member of the mint family (including lemon balm), you will want to plant it in its own container to keep it from spreading and taking over the garden. If you are growing in a raised bed or in the ground, simply nestle the container into the soil.

Pamper Your Plants

Check daily to see if they need watering, especially during the summertime, or if you are growing in containers, which tend to dry out more quickly than in-ground herb gardens or raised beds. Water thoroughly if the top inch of the soil is dry. Then, to keep herbs growing strong throughout the season, be sure to feed them every week or two with a liquid plant food such as Miracle-Gro® LiquaFeed® Tomato, Fruits & Vegetables Plant Food.

Harvest Frequently

Herbs respond well to harvesting and will grow thicker and bushier with frequent snipping. For best results, harvest in the morning using a pair of garden shears or kitchen scissors. Never remove more than one-third of the plant, so that it can recuperate and continue growing throughout the season. Also, know that herbs taste best before flowering. By pinching back basil as soon as you see blooms beginning to form, for instance, you will extend the herb's harvest life.

Lesson Summary:

Enjoy your herbs. The best way to experience an herb garden is to plant one. Use them in your cooking to enhance the flavor and reduce the need for salt.

Suggested Activities:

- Tour a garden cent that carries herbs
- Share your herb plants with fellow members.

Suggested Materials:

Russ, K., & A. P. (n.d.). Clemson Cooperative Extension. Retrieved June 28, 2023, from <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/herbs/>

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