



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

Growing and Using Culinary Herbs

Objectives: Gain knowledge about growing, harvesting and using culinary herbs.

Lesson Overview/Introduction: Herbs are easy to grow and add great flavor to everyday foods. Using herbs grown at home is less expensive than purchasing fresh herbs.

Lesson:

What qualifies as an herb? Lots of people use the words herbs and spices interchangeably. Technically, only leaves, stems, or flowers used in cooking or baking are considered herbs. Spices can be seeds, bark, roots, or fruits used in cooking.

Growing Your Own

Are herbs easy to grow? YES!! Herbs can be grown from seed, by cuttings, or by division. Generally, they require little fertilization, can tolerate poor soils, do well in full sun, and tolerate most pests.

Want to grow from seed?

Many herbs can be grown from seed and will be ready to harvest in a matter of a few weeks.

Basil	40 days
Oregano	40 days
Dill	45 days
Fennel	50 days
Chives	60 days
Parsley	70 days
Mint	80 days

Would you prefer to take a cutting and root the plant?

It's easy to do: Simply harvest a vigorous stem containing several leaves, strip away all but the top 3-4 leaves, and place the stem in fresh, clear water with plenty of indirect sunlight. Within days, roots will appear. When roots have grown 3-4 inches long, transplant them into potting soil in a suitable container (or continue to grow in fresh water if you plan to use the herb within the next several days.)

These herbs are easy to grow from a cutting:

Basil, Thyme, Oregano, Mint, Catnip, Scented Geranium

Do you prefer to divide an existing herb plant?

It's easy to do: In the spring or fall, insert a knife (or any sharp instrument) into the center of the rootball. Cut through the soil and roots until the one rootball becomes two. Replant each rootball into a suitable location or container and water well.

Many herbs can be divided easily, such as Thyme, Chives, Tarragon, Marjoram, and Sage. Most woody-stemmed herbs or herbs that grow in clumps can be divided without problems.

Good Culinary Choices

All herbs will add flavor to recipes.

Mint: Leaves offer a bright, fresh flavor. Dried or fresh leaves can be used in iced or hot teas. Fresh leaves can be used in salads, salad dressing, and most savory dishes. It's also a good choice for jellies.

Note: Mint will tolerate partial shade and poor/sandy soil. It tends to be deer-resistant, and the flowers are attractive to pollinators. Plants in the mint family have square-shaped stems. **This plant spreads aggressively via underground rhizomes; it is contained easiest by growing it in a pot rather than directly in the ground.

Cilantro: Leaves are best used fresh. It is a common ingredient in Hispanic recipes. Cilantro is considered a "love it" or "hate it" flavor. Depending on your specific tastebuds, you might "love it" and interpret the flavor as tangy and similar to citrus. Or, you might "hate it" because your tastebuds interpret the flavor as soapy. The entire plant (stems and leaves) imparts the distinctive flavor. Did you know that seeds from the cilantro plant are sold as the spice coriander?

Note: Cilantro will tolerate partial (afternoon) shade. It is best grown in the spring or fall when temperatures are cooler because it will bolt with heat. It tends to be deer-resistant.

Thyme: Thyme is available in many varieties. But *Thymus vulgaris* is the preferred species for culinary uses. Thyme leaves have a savory, woody flavor that is excellent in sauces, stews and most meat dishes.

Note: Thyme is a woody plant that lives as a perennial in southern states. It prefers full sun and will tolerate sandy soil and drought. It tends to be deer and rabbit-resistant and, when in bloom, is attractive to pollinators.

Rosemary: Rosemary leaves are long and slim and grow on a woody stem. Leaves tend to have a pine flavor that is excellent with most meats and heavy, savory dishes. Leaves can be incorporated directly into the dish, and the woody stems are good for shishkebob.

Note: Rosemary is a perennial plant that will grow into an attractive, evergreen upright shrub with small purple flowers unless pruned regularly. It tends to be deer and rabbit-resistant. It prefers full sun and will tolerate drought. If left unpruned, it can grow up to 4 feet high over time.

Chives: A member of the onion family, chive leaves are long, thin and tubular. The oniony flavor is excellent in almost all savory dishes. The edible purple flowers also have an oniony flavor, making a beautiful garnish or add-in to salads.

Notes: When harvesting, cut chives down to within 1-2 inches of the soil. Chives are perennials that grow from a bulb (like an onion), prefer sunny locations, and tolerate drought. They tend to be deer and rabbit-resistant, and the purple blooms draw butterflies.

Oregano: This hardy perennial plant is a common flavor in Italian and Hispanic recipes. It is a great flavor addition to both hot and cold savory dishes.

Notes: This plant tolerates full sun, can withstand poor soil conditions and is generally deer-resistant. When allowed to bloom, it is attractive to pollinators.

Dill: This annual plant is a favorite for those who make pickles at home. The fern-like foliage is tasty in cold and hot savory dishes. The seeds hold the same flavor as the foliage.

Notes: This plant will grow 3-5 feet tall. It tends to be deer-resistant but also attracts many beneficial insects. It also is a food source for butterfly larvae.

Fennel: Fennel and Dill have many similar qualities. They both produce seeds that are flavored the same as the fern-like foliage. They both grow 3-5 feet tall. Both tend to be deer-resistant but also serve as a good source for butterfly larvae. Fennel has a distinctive taste of licorice and is typically used in cold salads.

Sage: Sage leaves offer a distinctive, earthy flavor that some claim resembles pine. It pairs well with savory dishes such as meats and casseroles (especially southern-style Thanksgiving dressing.)

Notes: Sage is a perennial that can tolerate part-sun locations and poor soils. It is deer-resistant and, if allowed to bloom, it is attractive to pollinators.

Why would I grow herbs when I can buy fresh ones in the grocery store?

Growing your own herbs is a bargain if you enjoy using fresh herbs when cooking. It is far less expensive to grow a pot of herbs than to purchase fresh-cut herbs from the produce section of the grocery store. The convenience of fresh-cut herbs is undeniable but plan on paying \$5 or more for each small bundle.

Group Activity:

Got your smartphone? Look up and share information (pictures, too, if possible!) with the group about these less common herbs with their unique characteristics:

Sweet Cicely- the name of the plant is a hint of the flavor

Bay Laurel- great flavor, but discard the leaf prior to serving the recipe

Bee Balm- beautiful bloom, citrusy taste- definitely share a picture with the club if possible

References:

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<https://all-americanselections.org/aas-herbs/> <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/care-herbs-and-starting-herbs-seed>

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