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# The Abundant Herb Garden

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## My Simple Steps to Lush, Full Growth

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Well,  
Hello!

## WELCOME TO CELEBRATED HERB

Thank you for signing up for my weekly newsletter!  
I'm so glad you are here!

### About the Blog

Welcome to Celebrated Herb, where we're all about **infusing herbs into your home and lifestyle!** I'm Stephanie, and I'm thrilled to have you join our community of herb lovers.

At Celebrated Herb, we're dedicated to providing you with **everything you need to know about herbs**, from **gardening** and care tips to **harvesting and preserving** techniques. Explore our **herb-forward recipes, DIY projects, and ideas for incorporating herbs into gifts**, bath and beauty products, and **natural household items**.

**Whether you're a seasoned herb enthusiast or just starting out**, we're here to inspire and empower you to grow a healthy herb garden and make the most of your herbal bounty. Thank you for joining us on this herb-filled journey, and get ready for more exciting herb content coming your way!

# Introduction



Ever walked past those herb gardens in magazines that look so thick and full you can barely see the soil? My first attempts at growing herbs looked nothing like that - just a few sad plants with lots of empty space between them. After years of trial and error (and a few complete garden makeovers), I finally cracked the code.

This guide shares what I've learned from 30+ years of growing herbs in my Massachusetts garden. I'm skipping the basic stuff you already know and focusing on the techniques that transform sparse, ordinary herb patches into the lush, abundant gardens that make your neighbors stop and ask questions.

Whether you're starting fresh or looking to pack more life into an existing garden, these are the practical tips I wish someone had shared with me years ago. I've included my favorite herbs that reliably perform well and create that full, established look faster than you might think.

The best part? Most of these techniques actually make your herb garden easier to maintain, not harder. Ready to grow an herb garden that looks like it's been thriving for years, even if you're just getting started?

Let's dig in!

## Part 1: Foundation for Success



### **Selecting the Perfect Location**

#### **Sunlight Requirements**

Most herbs need at least 6 hours of direct sunlight to really shine. One of the most common questions I get from readers is why their basil stays small and leggy - almost always, it's insufficient sunlight. Mediterranean herbs like rosemary, sage, and lavender need even more sun to develop their essential oils and flavors.

If your garden has mixed lighting, save the shadier spots for mint, parsley, and chives - they'll still grow well with just 4-5 hours of sun. I've had mint thrive in spots where other herbs struggled.

#### **Accessibility Considerations**

Plant your herbs where you'll actually use them! After years of advising garden visitors, I've noticed that the most successful herb gardens are the ones within easy reach of the kitchen. My most-used culinary herbs grow right outside my kitchen in raised beds.

Consider how often you'll harvest and place herbs accordingly:

- Cooking herbs: As close to the kitchen as possible
- Tea herbs: Near a path you walk frequently
- Medicinal or craft herbs: Can be farther away since harvesting is less frequent

Think about ease of maintenance too. Can you reach all areas without stepping on plants? Is there a water source nearby? These small planning details make daily care much simpler.

## Creating the Ideal Soil Mix

### Amendment Recommendations

The biggest mistake I see new herb gardeners make is using regular garden soil without amendments. Herbs actually perform best in soil that's not too rich.

For a new bed, I mix:

- 60% regular topsoil
- 30% coarse sand or perlite
- 10% compost

This mix gives herbs the slightly lean conditions they prefer while still providing necessary nutrients. Don't go overboard with compost or fertilizer - too much nitrogen makes herbs grow fast but reduces essential oil production and flavor.



## Drainage Importance

Poor drainage is the number one culprit when readers write to me about herbs that keep dying. Almost all herbs hate wet feet.

If your soil holds water for more than a few hours after rain, you must improve drainage. In my garden, I've had great success with:

- Raised beds (even just 8-12 inches high makes a huge difference)
- Adding coarse sand to clayey soil
- Incorporating small gravel into the bottom layer of planting holes

For containers, always ensure there are drainage holes, and place a layer of gravel at the bottom before adding soil.

## pH Considerations

Most herbs prefer slightly alkaline to neutral soil (pH 6.5-7.0). I often see gardeners struggling with yellowing thyme and sage despite good sun and drainage - the culprit is usually acidic soil.

Mediterranean herbs particularly suffer in acidic soil. If your soil is naturally acidic (common in areas with lots of pine trees or where it rains frequently), add garden lime according to package directions in spring. Don't overdo it though - a little goes a long way.

Interestingly, a few herbs like blueberries and some varieties of thyme actually prefer slightly acidic soil. I've found that most culinary herbs are pretty forgiving of pH as long as you're not at the extremes.

With these foundations in place, you're ready to move beyond the basics and create that lush, full garden we're aiming for.



## Part 2: Strategic Planting for Fullness



### Plants vs. Seeds: Which to Choose When

#### A. Benefits of Starting with Small Plants

For a lush herb garden right from the start, I almost always recommend beginning with small plants rather than seeds. When I create a new herb bed, I use small nursery plants for about 75% of the space. Here's why:

- Instant impact - the garden looks established from day one
- Faster harvests - you can begin light harvesting within weeks, not months
- Higher success rate - especially for tricky herbs like lavender and rosemary
- Extended growing season - particularly helpful in shorter northern summers

I've found the best value is in buying the smallest size plant containers rather than the bigger, more expensive ones. Those little 4-inch pots or cell packs establish just as quickly as the gallon-sized plants but cost a fraction of the price.

## When Seeds Make Sense

That said, I do start about 25% of my herbs from seed. Some herbs actually perform better when directly seeded:

- Dill - grows quickly and resents transplanting
- Cilantro - bolts easily when root-disturbed
- Chervil - another herb that dislikes being moved
- Borage - grows so fast that plants aren't necessary

I also seed basil, but I start it indoors about 6 weeks before our last frost date. By planting time, I have nice bushy plants that are nearly the size of nursery plants.

Seeds also make financial sense for herbs you want in large quantities. I grow calendula as a companion plant throughout my herb garden, and buying that many plants would cost a fortune!



## The "Ignore the Spacing" Rule

### Why Traditional Spacing Creates Sparse Gardens:

The number one reason most herb gardens look sparse is following those spacing guidelines on plant tags. Those recommendations (usually 12-24 inches apart) are meant for mature plants in their second or third year!

When I first started gardening, I dutifully placed my thyme plants 18 inches apart. For two whole seasons, my herb garden looked like polka dots of green against bare soil. Not the lush garden of my dreams.

### How Close Planting Creates the Lush Look:

Now I plant herbs much closer together - typically 1/3 to 1/2 the recommended spacing.

For example:

- Thyme plants: 6-8 inches apart instead of 18
- Basil: 8 inches apart instead of 12-18
- Oregano: 10 inches apart instead of 24

This close planting has multiple benefits beyond just looking fuller:

- Less weeding - dense plantings shade out weeds
- Better moisture retention - less soil is exposed to sun and wind
- Creates beneficial microclimate - herbs shelter each other

One trick I use is planting in triangular patterns rather than rows or grids. This naturally fills spaces more efficiently and creates that cottage garden fullness that's so appealing.



## Maintenance Considerations

Close planting does require a few adjustments to your maintenance routine:

- Water at the base of plants rather than overhead to prevent fungal issues
- Monitor for signs of crowding and selectively trim as needed
- Harvest regularly - this actually helps maintain airflow and plant health

In my experience, the extra attention to watering is more than offset by the reduced weeding time. And since I'm harvesting regularly anyway, the pruning happens naturally as part of my kitchen routine.

One surprise benefit: densely planted herbs actually compete less than I expected. Instead, they seem to establish a nice balance, with each finding its niche in the garden ecosystem.



# Part 3: Design Principles for Visual Impact

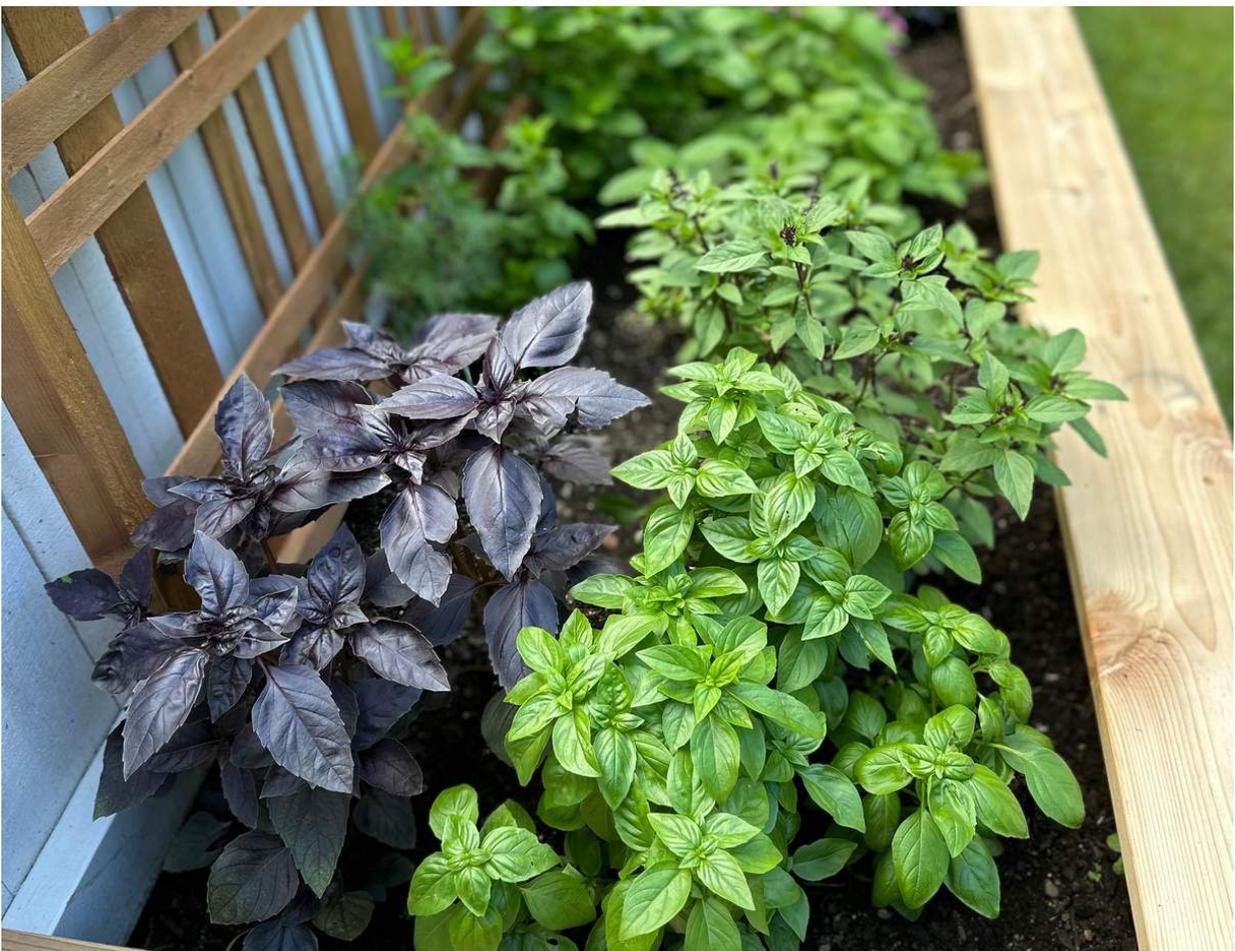
## Height Placement Strategy

### Tall Herbs for Back/Center

I always position my tallest herbs in the back of bordered beds or the center of island beds. This creates a natural backdrop while ensuring smaller plants aren't shaded out. Some of my favorite tall anchors include:

- Rosemary - I grow upright varieties that reach 3-4 feet
- Lavender - especially 'Provence' and 'Grosso' varieties
- Fennel - the bronze variety adds beautiful contrast
- Bay laurel - in my zone I grow this in a container that I can move indoors

If your garden is visible from all sides, I've found that slightly off-center placement of tall herbs creates more visual interest than putting them dead center.





### **Medium Herbs for Middle Areas**

The middle zone is where most of your culinary workhorses will live. These plants typically grow 1-2 feet tall and form the bulk of a lush herb garden:

- Sage - especially the variegated and purple varieties for color
- Basil - I mix green, purple, and Thai varieties for texture
- Winter savory - an underused herb that stays green nearly year-round
- Oregano - both ornamental and culinary varieties work well here

I arrange these medium-height herbs in drifts rather than single specimens, which gives the garden a more natural, flowing appearance.

### **Trailing Herbs for Edges**

The garden edges are perfect for plants that naturally spread or trail. These plants soften hard edges and create that spilling abundance that makes herb gardens look established:

- Thyme - silver, woolly, and lemon varieties create beautiful contrasts
- Creeping rosemary - cascades beautifully over walls and edges
- Prostrate varieties of sage - 'Berggarten' is a favorite
- Chamomile - the Roman variety forms a lovely mat

I avoid putting actual mint at the edges since it's so invasive. Instead, I keep mint contained in sunken pots within the garden.

## Grouping by Water/Soil Needs

### Mediterranean Section (Low Water, Excellent Drainage)

One corner of my herb garden is slightly raised with extra sand mixed in. This Mediterranean microclimate houses herbs with similar needs:

- Rosemary, thyme, and lavender - the classic drought-tolerant trio
- Sage and oregano - both thrive in hot, dry conditions
- Winter savory - becomes woody and aromatic in lean soil

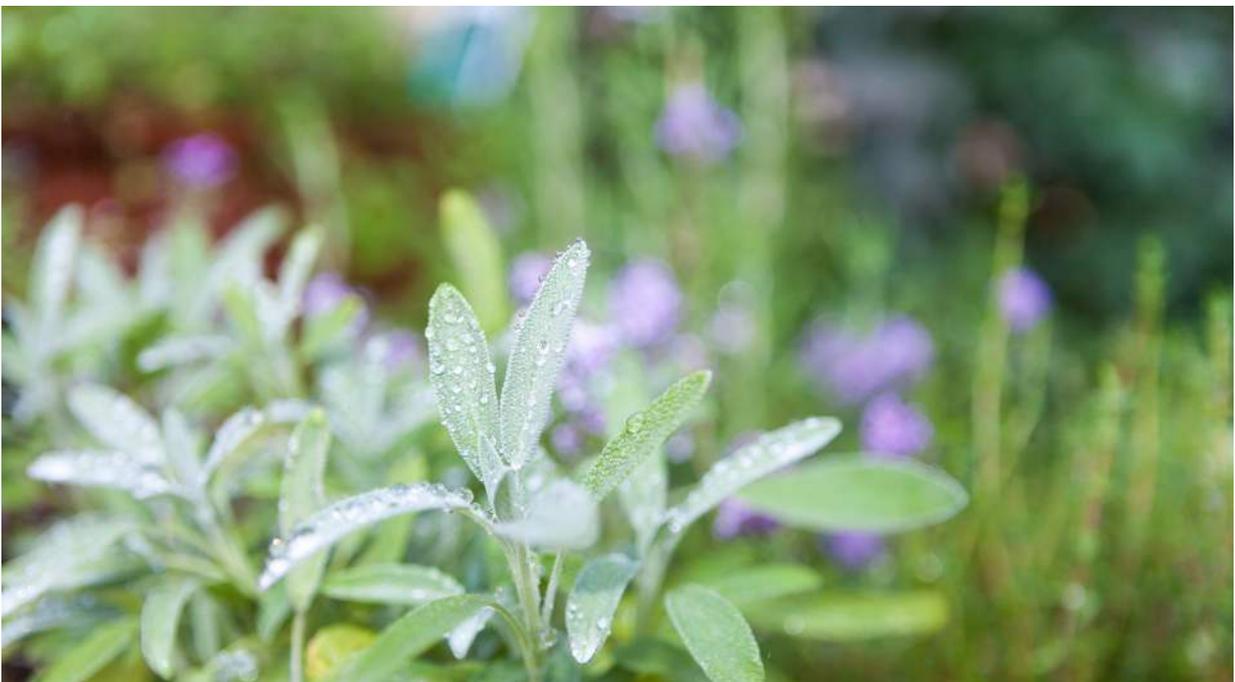
These plants get watered deeply but infrequently, allowing soil to dry completely between waterings. I've found this grouping practically maintains itself once established.

### Moisture-Loving Section

In a slightly lower area that naturally retains more moisture, I group herbs that prefer consistent dampness:

- Mint family plants (I plant in containers to control spread)
- Chives and garlic chives
- Lemon balm (also contained - it can be vigorous)
- Parsley and cilantro

This section gets watered twice as often as my Mediterranean bed. The soil here has extra compost mixed in to hold moisture.



## Shade-Tolerant Groupings

Along the northern edge where my garden receives only 4-5 hours of sun, I've created a special section for shade-tolerant herbs:

- Sweet woodruff - creates a beautiful ground cover
- Lemon balm - actually performs better with afternoon shade
- Chervil - one of the few culinary herbs that prefers shade
- Some varieties of mint - especially chocolate mint

These groupings not only make maintenance easier but also create visually harmonious plantings where everything looks like it belongs together. The plants within each section tend to complement each other in appearance since they've evolved for similar conditions.

## Design Tip: Plant Planning Made Simple

When I'm planning a lush herb garden with all these different features, I always start with a quick two-step process that saves me countless headaches later:

Step 1: Create a simple chart listing each herb with three key pieces of information:

- Height (tall, medium, trailing)
- Water needs (drought-tolerant, moderate, moisture-loving)
- Sunlight requirements (full sun, part shade, shade tolerant)

Step 2: Grab paper and pencil to sketch my garden space. I mark the compass directions, note existing features like walls or slopes, and then start placing herbs according to their groups.

I've found this quick planning step prevents me from having to move established herbs later. It also helps me visualize how the garden will look when mature, not just at planting time. The physical act of sketching it out often reveals opportunities for better combinations that I might miss when just thinking about the garden.

Even a rough five-minute sketch can be the difference between a garden that looks thoughtfully designed and one that seems randomly planted. I keep this sketch in my garden journal so I can refer back to it as the garden develops

## **Integrating Ornamental Flowers Among Herbs**

The secret to a truly beautiful herb garden isn't just the herbs themselves—it's—the strategic addition of flowering plants. I always tuck flowers throughout my herb beds rather than keeping them separate.

For a cohesive look, I plant flowers in odd-numbered groups (3, 5, or 7 plants) rather than single specimens. This creates natural-looking drifts of color that enhance rather than compete with the herbs. I also repeat the same flowers in different areas to create rhythm and flow through the garden.

When placing flowers, I consider their bloom time and try to ensure there's always something flowering in each section of the garden. Spring bulbs give way to early summer perennials, followed by summer annuals and fall-blooming plants.





### **Recommendations for Compatible Flowers**

These flowering plants have proven themselves as perfect herb garden companions in my garden:

- Calendula - Easy from seed, long-blooming, and the petals are edible
- Nasturtiums - Both flowers and leaves are edible with a peppery flavor
- Dianthus - The low-growing varieties form neat mounds between herbs
- Alliums - Ornamental onions that complement herbs beautifully
- Agastache (anise hyssop) - Tall purple spikes that bloom for months
- Echinacea - Adds height and structure plus medicinal benefits
- Black-eyed Susans - Reliable yellow blooms that brighten any herb bed

For spring color, I always plant:

- Dwarf iris - Finish blooming just as herbs hit their stride
- Species tulips - More perennial than hybrid tulips
- Crocus - Provide early-season interest when herbs are just waking up

For containers, I've had great success with:

- Violas - Charming edible flowers that don't overshadow herbs
- Alyssum - Creates a fragrant spilling edge
- Compact zinnias - Reliable summer-long color

## Benefits Beyond Aesthetics

The flowers in my herb garden aren't just pretty—they're functional too. 

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### Pollinator Attraction

More pollinators means better herb growth and seed production. Since adding flowering plants throughout my herb garden, I've noticed:

- Increased herb vigor - Plants seem healthier with pollinators around
- Better seed set for saving - My dill and cilantro produce more viable seeds
- Continuous activity - Different pollinators visit throughout the day

My herbs that need to flower for harvest (like chamomile and calendula) produce significantly more blooms when surrounded by other flowering plants that attract pollinators.

### Pest Deterrence

Certain flowering companions actively help protect herbs:

- Marigolds - Their root secretions deter nematodes in the soil
- Nasturtiums - Act as trap crops for aphids, drawing them away from herbs
- Sweet alyssum - Attracts hoverflies whose larvae devour aphids
- Borage - Deters tomato hornworms (helpful when herbs are planted near tomatoes)

I've noticed far fewer pest problems since incorporating these flowering plants. The garden seems to find its own balance with beneficial insects moving in to control the problematic ones.

As an added bonus, many of these flowering plants are useful themselves. I harvest calendula for skin salves, use nasturtium in summer salads, and dry echinacea for winter tea. They're not just ornamental additions—they're an extension of the herb garden's usefulness.



# Part 5: My Top 12 Herbs for a Lush Garden

## Lavender

For a garden that looks established quickly, lavender is essential. I grow several varieties:

- 'Hidcote' and 'Munstead' - Compact forms perfect for edges and tight spaces
- 'Provence' and 'Grosso' - Larger varieties that create dramatic height

Lavender works best in the sunniest, driest part of the garden. I plant it where it can spill over pathways - the brushing releases that wonderful fragrance. For the fullest plants, I trim lightly after the first bloom to encourage a second flush of flowers.

## Sage

Sage varieties offer incredible diversity in a lush garden:

- Culinary sage (*Salvia officinalis*) - The classic cooking herb
- Purple sage - Rich color that contrasts beautifully with silver plants
- Tricolor sage - Variegated leaves add brightness to green herbs
- Pineapple sage - Late-season red flowers that attract hummingbirds

I place sage plants where they can spread out a bit - they get woody at the base over time. Cutting them back by about half in early spring keeps them bushy rather than leggy.

## Rosemary

I consider rosemary the backbone of a Mediterranean-style herb garden:

- Upright varieties like 'Tuscan Blue' create structure
- Trailing types like 'Prostratus' soften edges and walls

In my garden, I position rosemary on the south-facing side of walls where it gets reflected heat. This placement helps it survive winter in my northern climate. Unlike many herbs, rosemary looks

## **Dill**

Dill creates the airy, meadow-like quality that makes herb gardens feel natural:

- 'Bouquet' - Tall variety great for back of beds
- 'Fernleaf' - Compact form for containers or front-of-border

I allow a few dill plants to go to seed each year. They self-seed reliably, filling in gaps and creating that casual abundance. The volunteer seedlings often grow in unexpected places, adding to the garden's relaxed charm.

## **Oregano**

Few herbs create fullness as quickly as oregano:

- Greek oregano - Intensely flavored culinary variety
- 'Hot and Spicy' - Even stronger flavor
- Golden oregano - Bright foliage that lights up shady corners

I use oregano's spreading habit to my advantage, letting it weave between more upright herbs. Regular harvesting keeps it from overwhelming neighbors, and the more I cut, the bushier it gets.

## **Lemon Balm**

Lemon balm fills spaces quickly with its bright green leaves and wonderful citrus scent:

- Common lemon balm - Vigorous spreader
- 'Aurea' - Golden-leaved variety that brightens shady spots

Because lemon balm self-seeds enthusiastically, I deadhead most flower stalks before they set seed. I also plant it in areas bordered by paths that act as natural barriers to its spread. When it does wander too far, it's easy to pull out unwanted plants.

## **Basils**

No herb creates summer abundance faster than basil:

- Sweet basil - The classic Italian variety
- Thai basil - Purple stems and anise flavor
- 'Purple Ruffles' - Dramatic color and frilled edges

I pinch basil plants frequently to create bushy growth - one plant properly pruned can look like three. I plant basil between slower-growing perennial herbs to fill space while they mature.

## Thyme

For edges and walkways, nothing beats thyme:

- English thyme - Classic culinary variety
- Lemon thyme - Bright flavor and more upright habit
- Woolly thyme - Silvery foliage, excellent in rock gardens
- Creeping thyme - Creates a living carpet

I plant different thyme varieties in masses rather than singles. When they bloom, they create sweeps of color that bees absolutely love. After flowering, a light trim with scissors keeps them neat.

## Mints

Mint adds lushness with minimal effort:

- Spearmint - My go-to for cooking and tea
- Peppermint - More intense flavor
- Chocolate mint - Amazing fragrance
- Apple mint - Soft, fuzzy leaves

I always plant mint in containers sunk into the ground to contain the roots. This allows me to enjoy mint's vigorous growth without it taking over. Every few years, I dig up and divide mint to rejuvenate the plants.

## Parsley

Both main parsley types have their place in a lush garden:

- Flat-leaf parsley - Better flavor for cooking
- Curly parsley - Creates textural interest

Since parsley is biennial (lives two years), I plant new seedlings every spring while letting a few second-year plants flower. The tall yellow umbels add height and attract beneficial insects before setting seed for the next generation.

## Chives

For reliability and early-season interest, nothing beats chives: \_\_\_\_\_

- Common chives - Pink-purple flowers and onion flavor
- Garlic chives - White flowers and garlicky taste

I divide my chive clumps every three years to keep them vigorous. The purple pom-pom flowers are beautiful in spring, and even after cutting back the spent blooms, the strappy foliage adds texture all season.

## Cilantro

Cilantro creates fresh green fullness in cooler weather:

- 'Santo' - Slow-bolting variety
- 'Calypso' - Heat-tolerant type
- Vietnamese cilantro - Perennial alternative in warm climates

Since cilantro bolts quickly in heat, I succession plant it every few weeks. I also allow some plants to flower and set seed (coriander), which I collect for cooking and replanting. The lacy white flowers attract tiny beneficial wasps that help control pests.

## Part 6: Maintenance for Continued Fullness

### Pruning Techniques for Bushier Growth

The biggest secret to maintaining a lush herb garden is regular pinching and pruning. I've found that most herbs respond to cutting by branching out and becoming fuller.

For soft-stemmed herbs like basil and mint, I pinch the top inch of growth once plants reach about 6 inches tall. This causes them to branch at that point. Then, when each of those branches has 2-3 sets of leaves, I pinch them again. One basil plant treated this way can become a bushy mound instead of a single leggy stem.

For woody herbs like rosemary, lavender, and sage, I use a slightly different approach. In early spring, I trim them back by about one-third, making cuts just above a leaf node or branching point. This prevents them from becoming woody and sparse at the base.

Some herbs like oregano and thyme benefit from a more drastic haircut. After their first flowering, I trim the whole plant back by half. This might look severe for a week or two, but they quickly push out fresh, compact growth that looks fuller than before.



## Fertilizing Schedule (Less is Often More)

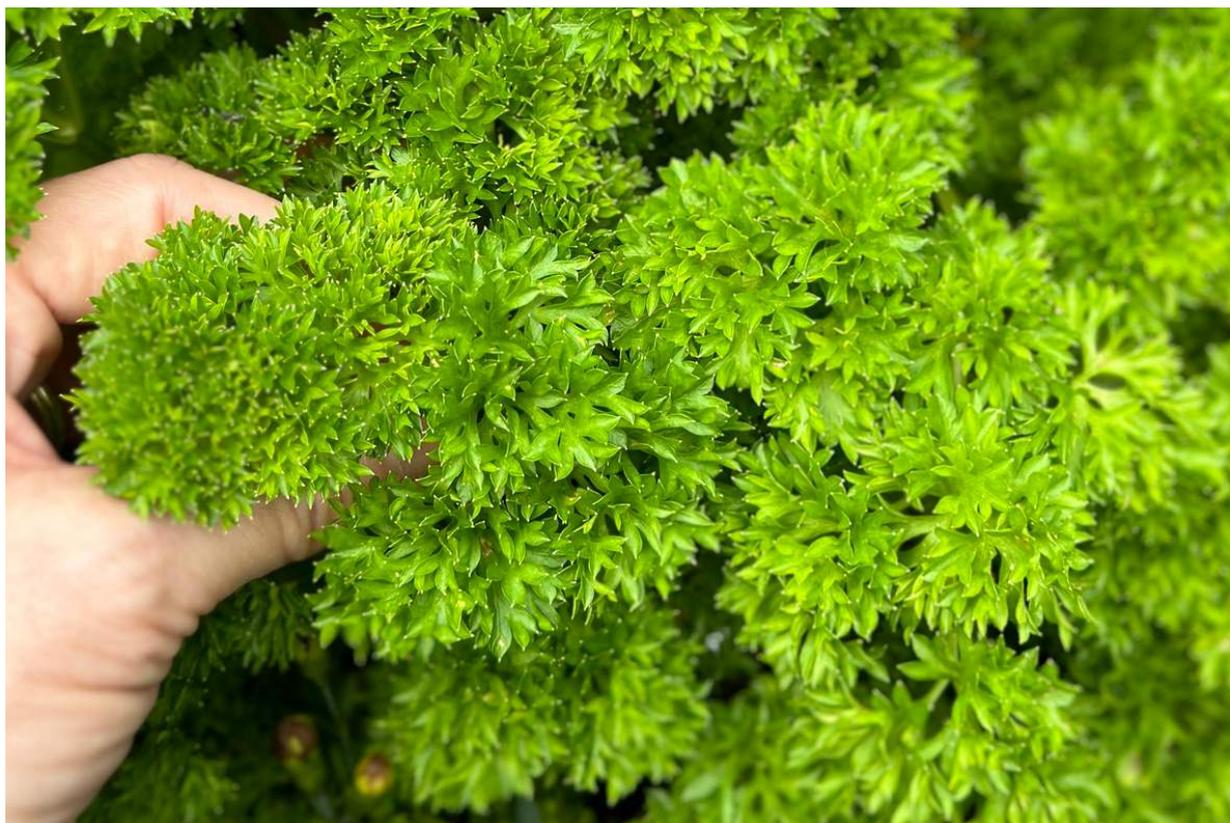
When it comes to fertilizing herbs, less is definitely more. Over-fertilized herbs grow quickly but have less flavor and fragrance. They also tend to get leggy rather than bushy.

My fertilizing routine is simple:

- Spring: Light application of compost as a top dressing
- Early summer: One application of half-strength balanced organic fertilizer
- Fall: Another light compost top dressing

For Mediterranean herbs like rosemary, lavender, and thyme, I skip the summer feeding entirely. These plants evolved in poor soil and actually produce more aromatic oils when slightly stressed.

If herbs start looking pale during the growing season, I use a foliar spray of compost tea rather than granular fertilizer. This gives them a quick boost without promoting too much soft growth.



## Succession Planting Strategy

To maintain fullness throughout the growing season, I use succession planting for annual herbs and those that fade after flowering. Basil, cilantro, and dill are perfect candidates for succession planting.

Instead of putting in all my basil plants at once in spring, I start some indoors every 3-4 weeks from March through July. This way, when older plants start to decline, fresh young ones are ready to take their place. For biennials like parsley, I sow seeds in spring and again in mid-summer. The younger plants provide fresh growth when the older ones start to get tough.

I mark spots in the garden where spring-flowering bulbs go dormant and use these spots for summer annuals. The bulbs provide early season interest, and summer herbs hide the dying bulb foliage.



## Harvesting to Promote Fullness

Regular harvesting is the easiest and most rewarding way to keep herbs full and bushy. I harvest at least weekly during the growing season, even if I don't need that much for cooking.

When harvesting leafy herbs like basil and mint, I cut whole stems rather than picking individual leaves. I make cuts just above a set of leaves, which encourages the plant to branch at that point.

For herbs grown primarily for their leaves (basil, oregano, mint), I harvest before they flower. Once flowering begins, the stems become woody and leaf production slows down. If I spot flower buds forming, I pinch them off to redirect the plant's energy to leaf growth.

For woody herbs like rosemary and sage, I harvest by cutting the top 2-3 inches of growth. This keeps plants compact and encourages side branching.

Some herbs like chives benefit from occasional hard cutting. Every few weeks, I'll cut a clump of chives all the way back to about 2 inches from the ground. This triggers fresh, tender growth and prevents the plants from getting floppy.

These maintenance practices might seem like extra work, but I incorporate them into my regular garden routine. The minutes spent pinching and pruning save hours of rehabilitation work later on, and the result is a consistently lush, productive herb garden that looks good all season long.

# Quick Reference Checklist

To create and maintain that lush, full herb garden we've been discussing, keep this checklist handy:

- Location basics: 6+ hours of sun for most herbs, easy access for harvesting
- Soil foundation: Well-draining mix with moderate fertility
- Strategic planting: Use plants for immediate impact, close spacing (1/2 recommended distance)
- Design for impact: Tall herbs in back/center, medium in middle, trailing on edges
- Group by needs: Mediterranean plants together, moisture-lovers together
- Add flowering companions: For color, pollinator attraction, and pest control
- Maintain for fullness: Regular pinching, light fertilizing, succession planting
- Harvest often: Cut just above leaf nodes to encourage branching

Print this out and keep it with your garden tools as a quick reminder when you're working in your herb garden.

# Conclusion

## Invitation to Share Photos

I'd love to see your herb garden transform with these techniques! Send photos of your herb garden to me by replying to any email. I feature reader gardens in my monthly newsletter, and it's always inspiring to see how these principles work in different growing conditions.

Whether you're just starting or have an established garden that you've enhanced with these ideas, sharing your progress helps our whole gardening community grow. Plus, I'm always happy to offer specific advice if you include questions with your photos.



# Thank you!

Thank you for joining our community of herb lovers here at Celebrated Herb! We're thrilled to have you on board and excited to share our passion for all things herbal with you.

At Celebrated Herb, we dive deep into the world of herbs, covering topics like herb gardening and care, harvesting and preserving techniques, herb-forward recipes, DIY projects and gifts featuring herbs, as well as creating natural bath, beauty, and household products using herbs.

Expect insightful guides, creative ideas, and plenty of inspiration to help you grow a thriving herb garden and make the most of your herbal bounty. Whether you're a seasoned herb enthusiast or just starting out, there's something for everyone in our herb-loving community.

Get ready to embark on a delightful journey of herbal exploration with us at Celebrated Herb. Stay tuned for more exciting herb content coming your way soon!

## Happy Gardening!



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