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P.O. Box 367  
Barnstable, MA 02630  
508-375-6690  
www.capecodextension.org



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## A Hard Times Guide to Successful Vegetable Gardening

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### Growing Herbs

Herbs are plants used whole or in part for flavor, but many of these same herbs are also used for fragrance, health, ornament, and many other uses. Herbs can be used to make teas; perk up cooked foods such as meats, vegetables, sauces, and soups; or to add flavor to vinegars, butters, dips, or mustards.

Herbs as a group are relatively easy to grow. Begin your herb garden with the herbs you enjoy using the most. For example, choose basil, oregano, and fennel for Italian cooking; lavender and lemon verbena for making potpourri; or chamomile, peppermint, and blue balsam mint if you plan to make your own teas.

Most herbs prefer well-drained soil and a sunny location. Add organic matter if your soil is heavy or compacted. Herbs usually suffer from few pest or fungal problems and require only minimal watering when established (perennials are established by the second growing season). Fertilizer is also unnecessary for most herbs unless frequent, heavy harvests are desired.

Herbs can be grown in a designated bed, as part of a vegetable plot, or in a perennial flower border. The final location of the herbs may also be related to their ultimate use: a kitchen garden may be near the back door, a moonlight garden near a porch or screen room, or scented herbs near a pathway.

Plan your herb garden by grouping herbs according to light, irrigation, and soil requirements. While most herbs enjoy full sun, a few tolerate shade. Herbs can be classified as either annual, biennial, or perennial. Be aware of the growth habits of the plants before you purchase them. Some herbs, such as borage, anise, caraway, chervil, coriander, cumin, dill, and fennel, should be direct-seeded, because they grow easily from seed or do not transplant well. Other herbs, such as mints, oregano, rosemary, thyme, and tarragon, should be purchased as plants and transplanted or propagated by cuttings to ensure production of the desired plant.

Keep in mind many herbs are perennial so planting now will give you a harvest this fall and into the next growing season.

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Paul Lopes  
UMass Extension Specialist, Agriculture and Landscape Program 4/09