



Using Favorite Home-Grown Herbs

Aloe Vera. Cut a section and use the fresh juice for minor burns, insect bites and rashes. The less care you give this plant, the better it grows. Likes shade.

Artemisia. A group of plants now used mainly for landscaping because of their silver-gray foliage. Includes Wormwood, Southernwood, Silver Queen, Silver King and Dusty Miller. Very tough, insect-free plants, *but be very cautious if using these herbs medicinally.*

Basil. Many varieties, including Sweet Green, Spicy Globe, Lemon, Cinnamon, Holy, Licorice, Purple-Ruffled, Cuban and Thai. Not all can be used for cooking. Sweet Green Basil is the tomato herb, and a staple in Italian cooking. Freeze the fresh leaves for future use. Nip flower buds to prolong plant life.

Borage. Young leaves are used in salads. Blue, star-shaped flowers are often candied and used to decorate cakes and pastries. Great for attracting bees to the garden. Start from seed in the late fall or early spring.

Salad Burnet. Use leaves in salads, salad dressings or any dish you wish to have a cucumber flavor without the "burp". Attractive plant to use for borders.

Catnip. One of the mints. Cats love it. Grow in hanging baskets to keep them out! Makes a soothing tea for humans. Starts from seed.

Chamomile. Feathery, green foliage with small daisy-like flowers that are used to brew a sleep-inducing tea. Also known as *Manzanilla*. Likes cool weather.

Chives. The smallest member of the onion family. Use leaves to give a mild onion flavor to dishes. Garlic Chives are much easier to grow and are used extensively in Oriental cooking for their mild garlic flavor. Easy to grow from seed.

Comfrey. Large plant with coarse leaves and white flowers. Very invasive once established. Used mainly as an ingredient in lotions to treat topical wounds such as scrapes. Should never be ingested. Use caution on open cuts and wounds. Will do wonders for compost piles. Start from root divisions or transplants. Does well in large containers.

Dill. One of the easiest herbs to grow from seed. Plant early in the spring or fall--likes cool weather. Used for pickling, to flavor most vegetables, fish, breads and vinegars. Freeze leaves for later use. Large green caterpillars that love to dill, parsley and fennel will turn into Swallowtail butterflies, so plant enough for you and them!

Espazote (American Wormseed). A very weedy herb whose main use is to cook with pinto beans to prevent some of the undesirable side effects beans often have. Use about 5 medium leaves to 1 pound of dry beans. *Do not let this plant go to seed or you will have it everywhere.* Freeze leaves for future use.

Fennel. Very much like dill, but having a sweeter anise or licorice flavor. Plant from seed in late fall or early spring; likes cool weather. There are 2 types: Bronze is grown for leaves and seeds, Finocchio for edible stalks.

Garlic. Plant cloves in mid-October for harvest in spring. Entire books have been written on this plant and its qualities. We should all eat more for the healthful benefits and flavor it adds to many dishes.

Lavender. With its gray foliage and sweet-scented flower spikes, Lavender is a must for any herb garden. Likes good drainage, takes 2 years to really get established, as most perennials do. Lavender "Vera" is best for this area.

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Lemon Balm. Member of the mint family with strong lemon scent and flavor. Easily started from seeds, roots or transplants. Spreads rapidly. Use leaves to make hot or cold tea, or as a garnish to fruit cups and salads.

Lemon Grass. Tropical grass prized for its lemon-flavored leaves, used to make hot or cold tea. Tender inner leaves used in Oriental dishes and soup. Most famous use is Lemon Grass Chicken. Must be started from root divisions. Grows anywhere Johnson grass will grow, and looks very much like it.

Lemon Verbena. A small shrub with very strong lemon-scented leaves. Prune tips of young plants to encourage bushy growth. Use anytime you need a lemon flavor. Start from cuttings or transplants. Highly desirable plant.

Marjoram. Cousin of Oregano with a more delicate, sweet flavor. Many types available; all are edible. Can be used in any dish where you would use Oregano or Sage. Best grown from root cuttings or transplants.

Parsley. A must for the herb garden. Loaded with vitamins and minerals. There are 2 types best suited for here, the curled or French Parsley and the flat-leaved or Italian Parsley which has a stronger flavor, but goes to seed with the onset of warm weather. Plant both from seed in the fall; it seldom freezes in our area. Transplants easily when young. Likes full sun, good drainage.

Perilla. A very attractive member of the mint family that should be grown more for the striking maroon foliage. Sometimes called Summer Coleus. Start from seed in full sun. Used in some Japanese dishes. Excellent landscape annual.

Rosemary. The most popular herb in the world. One of the best herbs for use in landscape plantings. It thrives in our hot, dry climate. Many varieties and forms such as upright and trailing or prostrate, which is not as freeze-hardy as the upright. Rosemary is a natural with pork and poultry. Use a branch to apply sauce while barbecuing chicken, and place a few leaves on roasts.

Rue. A plant widely grown in this area mostly for medicinal uses. This herb has a very old and interesting history associated with the church and witchcraft. Grows easily from seed or transplants. Be careful of blooms in hot weather, as they can exude an oil that some people find very irritating, like poison ivy.

Sage. This is another plant that doubles as a durable landscape plant in this area if it has good drainage. Very sensitive to over-watering. Best started from cuttings or transplants, but can be grown from seed. Many varieties available including Garden, Golden, Pineapple, Tri-color and Clary. A must for poultry stuffing. The leaves are best dried before use. Roast it with port or chicken; a must for seasoning sausage. Dried leaves keep their flavor for years.

Sorrel. The acid flavor of the leaves of this plant add an interesting flavor to salads, and can be cooked like spinach. Start from seeds in early spring.

Tansy. This is another herb no longer used as much as in times past. Grown for its insect repelling qualities; very strong smelling.

Tarragon. True French Tarragon is impossible to grow reliably in this area due to our hot summers. Very susceptible to red spider mites. Another Artemisia with the common name Russian Tarragon is widely grown in this area and grows very well, but has none of the desirable flavor. A good substitute that thrives here is the Mexican Mint Marigold, a member of the sunflower family, now often sold as "Texas Tarragon".

Yarrow. Once used for a dye of woollens, this is another plant that now serves best in a landscape capacity. It thrives in our heat and the wide, flat clusters of white, red/pink, or bright yellow flowers, combined with its lacy foliage, makes it a valuable addition to the garden. Stick with the red/pinks or yellows, as the white can get very weedy. "Coronation Gold" is the best yellow variety.

*The source for this **GVST Gardening Guide** is Ed Ware, Master Gardener and former copresident of the San Antonio Herb Society. Find out more about the Herb Society at their website: www.saherbs.org.*