

Growing bee-friendly herbs

There are a huge variety of culinary herbs which add flavour to all sorts of dishes. Herb scents stimulate the senses and can bring the garden indoors, providing opportunity to link the food we eat back to its roots. They are easy to grow and this activity will provide you with a herbal display that is not only useful but looks and smells good too. Many herbs can be easily grown from seed but to save time, ready-grown herb plants can be purchased from garden centres and supermarkets. You could also try propagating from a friend's plant – see our Growing Indoors resource for more info!

Herbs are among the most useful plants for attracting bees and other pollinators to our gardens. If we help the bees then they will help us by pollinating our food and providing honey and beeswax.

10 Bee and pollinator friendly herbs

1. Sage
2. Parsley
3. Mint
4. Chives
5. Coriander
6. Wild Marjoram
7. Fennel
8. Borage
9. Rosemary
10. Comfrey



Materials and equipment

- Gloves
- Scoops/trowels
- Re-useable cloths for tables
- Containers – can be anything that has drainage holes and isn't too heavy for participants to manage (e.g. window boxes, pots, coloured trugs with handles)
- Growing medium – Mediterranean herbs (rosemary, sage, thyme, marjoram, oregano) like free-draining poor soil and full sun, so a soil based compost mixed 50:50 with grit or sharp sand is good. – Mint, chives, parsley and chervil like fertile soil. General purpose peat free compost is good for all of these
- Herb plants – ask for donations or most garden centres will have a good selection in small pots
- Herb plants or seeds
- Plant labels
- Dustpan
- Sand
- Crocks or stones for drainage
- Potting tray.

- 1.** Get everyone involved right from the very start! Divide up the shopping and preparation tasks between the older and younger generations.
- 2.** prepare the activity area and put cloths on the tables:
 - a.** make sure there's plenty of space for everyone to sit at the table, in chairs or wheelchairs, and the surface is at the right height even for the smallest of participants. You may want to add in some cushions to boost on seats, or raise the table if people find they are bending.
 - b.** keep a dustpan handy to clean up any spilt compost
 - c.** set out equipment and materials according to group size and who can do what
 - d.** put any herb seeds in some dry sand and label them so they can be tipped into the palm of a hand to take a pinch for sowing
 - e.** prepare for hand washing/cleansing with a wipe/using gloves as suited to the participants
 - f.** gather resources to help provoke conversation and stimulate memory. Recipe books and pictures of herb food related products can help the older participants to reminisce and share their knowledge and recipes with younger participants. They may have the best advice for using herbs in cooking, or some great gardening tips to share!

Garden Organic have a really useful section on growing which can be downloaded from their website. They also have useful growing cards on individual herbs which can be downloaded and used to start your own resource collection.



Tip: The sand enables you to see where they have been sown!

Session plan

1. Make everyone comfortable at the table, wearing gloves and plasters if they have any cuts.
2. Introduce the activity – clearly explain what is being planted, talk about herbs and link to relevant cooking and farming activities you've done together.
3. If growing Mediterranean herbs, use a potting tray to mix equal horticultural sand and potting compost.
4. Put some crocks or stones in the bottom of your container for drainage.
5. Depending on which herbs you are planting, fill your container with either the 50:50 compost, sand mix or peat free compost to 5cm from the top.

TIP: Don't forget chives, chervil and parsley like a richer soil so pot together

If you are growing from plants

6. Decide how many plants you can fit in. 5 plants in a 30cm container is ideal without overcrowding them. Arrange the plants until you are happy with how they look.
7. Scoop out some compost to make a hole for the herb plants. Take the herb out of the small pot it is in and plant so it is at the same level as the pot it was in, gently press in the compost around it. Leave a 3cm gap between the top of the compost and the rim of the container to allow for watering.

TIP: Keep mint in its own container to stop it running wild!

If you are growing from seeds (e.g. coriander, chervil or basil)

8. Sow seeds on the soil surface and cover thinly with compost. By autumn these annual herbs will have run out of steam and died or gone to seed. Discard and sow more next spring.
9. Label your plants and put on a sunny window sill or outside so you have them close to hand and ready for use.
10. Clear the tables and put everything away.
11. Wait, and watch the herbs grow together! You can bring the group together to check in on your plants regularly... you'll be able to smell your success!
12. In spring, trim away any dead leaves ready for new growth. When they become congested, repot or plant out in the garden.



Generate conversation and explore sensory experiences

- What memories or feelings do herbs evoke? Pass round herbs to feel/squeeze/smell.
- Does anyone remember 'The Herbs', a children's programme they may have watched with their children? Dill the dog, Parsley the lion, Sage the owl.
- Where do herbs originate? Explain that the Mediterranean warmth releases oils and aroma.
- How have you used herbs in cooking? E.g. Mint in potatoes or tea, rosemary with roast lamb, basil in pesto or on pasta, sage and onion stuffing etc.
- Has anyone dried herbs to preserve them?
- Which is your favourite herb?
- Are any of the participants called Basil, Rosemary or Lavender? Do they know anyone who is?
- Does anyone know how herbs can be used in medicine?
- Design and grow a herb garden outside.
- Garden Organic have an activity sheet on how to build a herb spiral. You can download it from their website.
- Flavour meals using your herbs.
- Take herb cuttings and grow your own herb plants to sell at family days or school events.
- Show children how to take cuttings.
- Use your herbs in cooking activities.
- Try herb tea tasting.
- Have herbs on the table at mealtimes.
- Create herb posies for participants to keep.
- Press herbs or use in other art activities.

Tip: Flavour meals using your herbs.

About this resource:

Enjoyed this resource? Take your kitchen garden one step further by **building a compost heap for your veg scraps**. Learn how to **grow more herbs and veg the organic way**, **manage weeds without using pesticides**, and why **Peat Free compost** is the next big gardening trend. You can also order your **free nature friendly gardening guide** today.

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