



STARNOTE 215  
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# GROWING HERBS IN THE DESERT

## *A Guide to Herbs in the Desert*

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**Discover the world of herbs and bring fresh flavor and fragrance to your desert oasis!**

The desert climate shouldn't stop you from enjoying the taste and fragrance of fresh herbs! This guide provides everything you need to cultivate a thriving herb garden, adding a touch of beauty and deliciousness to your outdoor space.

### **Versatile Herbs for Every Purpose:**

Herbs offer a multitude of benefits:

- **Culinary Delights:** Elevate your dishes with a burst of flavor and aroma. From zesty basil to calming chamomile, find the perfect herb to complement any cuisine.
- **Natural Remedies:** Explore the potential of herbs for natural wellness solutions (consult a healthcare professional before using herbs medicinally).
- **Fragrant Oasis:** Create a sensory experience with aromatic herbs like lavender and rosemary, filling your garden with delightful scents.

### **Planting for Success:**

- **Location is Key:** While the desert sun provides ample warmth, afternoon shade is crucial for many herbs during the hottest summer months. Consider movable containers or raised planters for maximum flexibility.
- **Seasonal Selection:** Spring and fall offer prime planting times, but with portable containers, you can enjoy annuals year-round. Perennials thrive in the landscape or larger planters.
- **Bringing the Indoors:** During extreme weather, bring your portable herb gardens indoors to protect them and extend their lifespan.

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## Planting and Care:

### In Ground (using Dr. Q's® Paydirt Planting Mix):

- **Location:** Select a spot with morning sun or filtered shade, especially in hot desert climates.
- **Soil Preparation:** Amend your planting area with Dr. Q's® Paydirt Planting Mix to ensure well-draining soil. This will help prevent root rot and encourage healthy growth.

**Watering:** Water regularly, keeping the soil consistently moist but not soggy.

### In Containers (using Dr. Q's Herb & Vegetable Mix):

- **Container Selection:** Choose a pot with drainage holes and plenty of space for the roots to expand.
- **Soil:** Use a well-draining potting mix like Dr. Q's Herb & Vegetable Mix. This mix provides the nutrients and drainage herbs needs to thrive in a container.
- **Watering:** Water regularly, especially during hot weather, allowing the top inch of soil to dry slightly between waterings.

## Feeding for Flavor:

- **Starter Boost:** Start your herbs off strong with Dr. Q's Organic Stardust Starter Fertilizer at planting.
- **Continuous Growth:** Maintain consistent growth with Dr. Q's Organic Tomato and Vegetable Food throughout the growing season.

## Herb Spotlight:

This guide isn't exhaustive, but here are some popular desert-friendly herbs:

- **Arugula (annual):** This small fast-growing favorite offers a peppery kick to salads. Plant in early spring or fall and enjoy fresh harvests throughout the cooler months. Frequent watering is recommended due to its shallow root system and be sure to harvest regularly before the leaves become tough.
- **Basil (annual):** A culinary essential, basil comes in various flavors like Dark Opal, Lemon, Large Leaf, and Sweet. All varieties thrive in containers or gardens, adding a burst of summery flavor to tomato dishes, poultry stuffing, and more. Pinch flower spikes to encourage bushier growth and provide some afternoon shade during the hottest part of the day.
- **Caraway (annual):** Known best for its seeds, caraway thrives with some afternoon shade. To harvest, pick the flower heads and rub off the seeds. Use dried seeds to flavor bread, soups, sauces, stews, and salads, or sprinkle them over pork and sauerkraut. Some people enjoy caraway seeds after meals to aid digestion.

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- **Chives (perennial):** This small, clump-forming onion relative provides both beauty and flavor. Enjoy the grassy leaves and neat pink flowers for decoration, while chopped leaves or flowers add a subtle oniony touch to salads, vegetables, poultry, and more. Chives thrive in full to part sun.
- **Cilantro (annual):** A key ingredient in Asian and Mexican cuisine, cilantro boasts a unique flavor perfect for fresh salsas and various dishes. Plant in light shade, as cilantro prefers cooler conditions. Succession planting is recommended, as it tends to bolt (flower) in hot weather.
- **Dill (annual):** This medium-sized 2'x2' fern-like herb is a versatile culinary companion, enhancing everything from creamy potato salad and tangy pickles to light summer soups and grilled fish. Dill reseeds readily, so you can enjoy a continuous harvest throughout the season. Seeds are said to aid in the control of coughs, colds, and flu. Plant in morning sun or filtered shade for optimal growth.
- **Fennel (annual):** Similar to dill but with a coarser texture, fennel offers a unique licorice-like flavor. Use the leaves, stems, and seeds to enhance salads, fish, pork, vegetables, and pickling solutions. This herb is relatively drought tolerant once established. Plant in full sun and provide deep, infrequent watering.
- **Garlic (perennial bulb):** A culinary and medicinal powerhouse, garlic adds depth of flavor to most dishes. Eat raw or use tincture to help with colds, flu, respiratory infections, and other ills. Harvest garlic when the leafy tops fall over. Elephant Garlic boasts a very large bulb and milder flavor relative to regular garlic. Plant garlic in full sun.
- **Lavender (perennial):** This sweetly scented herb comes in various varieties and grows into a compact shrub. Lavender's fragrant purple flowers are used in perfumes, sachets, and as a flavoring for cakes, cookies, and even eggs. Additionally, lavender is said to relieve headaches, insomnia, and stress. Plant in well-drained soil for best results.
- **Oregano (perennial):** This upright herb spreads by underground stems and offers a strong, zesty taste to tomato dishes, potatoes, mushroom dishes, and marinades. Has been used for indigestion, coughs, and headaches. Plant oregano in full sun for best results.
- **Parsley (biennial treated as annual):** A decorative and versatile herb, parsley makes an attractive edging for gardens. Plant parsley annually in afternoon shade for optimal growth. Use fresh or dried parsley as a seasoning and enjoy its fresh leaves as a garnish and breath freshener.
- **Rosemary (perennial):** This fragrant herb doubles as an attractive drought-tolerant shrub. Use fresh or dried rosemary to enhance poultry, lamb, pork, stews, soups, and vegetables. Plant rosemary in full sun and provide deep, infrequent watering once established. Rosemary is said to have some medicinal uses but consult a healthcare professional before using it for such purposes.

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- **Sage (evergreen perennial):** Available in varieties like Pineapple, Purple, and Golden, sage offers a variety of culinary and medicinal uses. Enjoy its flavor in cheese dishes, stuffing, soups, beans, and peas. Sage is also used by many to aid digestion, and its tea is said to soothe coughs and colds. Plant sage in full sun with well-draining soil. Water deeply and infrequently once established. Some sage varieties, like Pineapple, are frost tender, so consider winter protection in colder climates.
- **Savory (annual/perennial):** This upright, globe-shaped 18" plant can be a substitute for marjoram or thyme in recipes. It's also an excellent container plant. Use fresh or dried savory in meats, fish, eggs, and green beans. Winter Savory is a perennial variety, but not as flavorful as its annual counterpart, Summer Savory. Plant savory in full to part sun.
- **Scented Geranium (perennial with winter protection):** This ornamental herb comes in a variety of delightful flavors like lemon, apple, chocolate, and lime. Use the leaves in sachets, for flavoring sauces, jellies, or scenting finger bowls. Scented geraniums are excellent container or garden plants. Plant them like other geraniums, providing afternoon shade and winter protection from frost and freezing.
- **Shallots (annual):** This small, onion-like plant produces clusters of edible bulbs from a single "mother" bulb. Shallots are prized for their distinctive flavor that enhances stews, vegetables, and a host of other dishes. Plant shallots in spring for fall harvest or fall for spring harvest. Provide full to part sun.
- **Tarragon (perennial):** This large plant grows to about 2 feet and spreads by underground rhizomes. It's dormant in winter and well-suited for containers. Divide tarragon every 2-3 years to maintain its vigor. Enjoy its flavor with meat, eggs, poultry, and seafood dishes. Plant tarragon in full or part sun.
- **Thyme (evergreen perennial):** Available in many varieties, thyme is a culinary essential, perfect for casseroles, stews, soups, eggs, potatoes, fish, and green vegetables. Plant thyme in full sun and water deeply but infrequently once established. Regularly prune the tips to shape and keep the plant neat.

### **A Word of Caution:**

When using herbs medicinally, consult a qualified healthcare professional and follow dosage instructions carefully.

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