



Growing Herbs and Perennials

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Herbs and perennial vegetables are the easiest way to get started with your own edible garden. These plants can be decorative, delicious and very easy to look after. Growing edible perennials, including herbs, is a great way to reduce the energy needed (including human energy) to produce food.

Perennial vegetables – plant once, harvest again and again

In Canberra's climate, most vegetables are annuals and need to be replanted every season. Perennials are the exception. There are some great perennial vegetables you can grow easily including globe artichokes and asparagus. For perennial plants, the effort of planting happens once and the joy of harvesting continues for years. Find a permanent spot in the garden that you can easily access for harvesting.

Some perennial vegetables to try growing

Rhubarb – plants produce well for a few years, then fresh plants need to be started from crowns. Plant in late winter or early spring. It is very hardy, but will appreciate lots of compost or well-rotted manure and plenty of water.

Asparagus – grown from crowns buried in the soil. Plant in winter and after 2 years, asparagus spears will pop up every year in early spring. You can harvest every day for weeks. Plants will last for 20 years. Home grown asparagus is fresh and sweet. It also needs feeding – give lots of compost and water well.

Artichoke – two different types of vegetables are commonly called 'artichokes'.

Globe artichokes grow above ground and produce a beautiful, edible flower which is commonly used in salads. They are semi-perennial; the plants last at least 5 years. Plant in mid-late winter and harvest after the first year. Globe artichokes prefer an open, sunny spot in the garden, with well-drained soil improved with decomposed manure or fertiliser.

Jerusalem artichoke is an unrelated plant also called a 'sunflower artichoke' and grown for its nutritious edible root or 'tuber'. Jerusalem artichokes grow vigorously pretty much anywhere and can spread quickly becoming invasive – so plant with care!

Growing herbs – colour and flavor, even in winter

Herbs are delicious in cooking, useful in natural remedies and decorative in the garden. Planting herbs and veggies together can help to control pests and diseases and promote growth.

- Rosemary is perfect with lamb roast;
- Dill seed is used to treat colic;
- A border of parsley is green and lush all year;
- Planting basil with tomatoes helps both grow strong (and they taste great together!)

All herbs thrive on being regularly 'trimmed' for use – just make sure to leave at least 1/3 of the plant leaves for future growth.

Perennial herbs

Once planted in a sunny spot, or potted up on the kitchen windowsill, most herbs need very little care. The easiest herbs to grow are the hardy perennials such as; rosemary, lavender, marjoram, thyme, oregano, sage, bay, chives, the list goes on. These will all grow through a Canberra winter.

Oregano, thyme and sage – are small, compact plants that grow well together and need little water. These herbs thrive in containers on a sunny window sill or in a hot spot in the garden.

Onion and garlic chives – need a moist area and don't mind partial shade. Being able to snip exactly the right amount for cooking saves money and prevents waste accumulating in the fridge.

Rosemary and lavender – are small shrubs that will attract bees to your garden, helping to ensure pollination of other plants. Both these herbs have many uses and are heavily perfumed – plant near a path if you like the fragrance.

As with perennial vegetables, find a permanent spot for these herbs. Plant them close to your kitchen door and you will be able to pop out and cut exactly the amount you want for the perfect, fresh addition to cooking.

Annual herbs

Annual herbs need to be replanted every year and will grow very quickly, adding lots of fragrance, colour and freshness to the garden.

Give them a sunny spot, a regular feeding and lots of water. Many have beautiful flowers, such as the blue stars of borage or the bright yellow umbels of dill. These are some of the most popular annual herbs:

Basil - what would summer be without fresh tomato and its soul mate, basil? Basil is the essential ingredient for pesto, can be added to soups, pasta and salads. Basil grows quickly from seed – plant lots and you'll enjoy it all summer and autumn.

Dill – is ridiculously easy to grow and will attract beneficial insects (to help control pest insects) to your garden. Dill is used with fish and seafood in cooking. Once you have planted dill, you may find its feathery foliage and bright yellow flowers continue to pop up throughout the year.

Coriander - both leaves and seeds are used in many cuisines. Coriander is easy to grow and decorative in amongst flowers or vegetables all through the garden. Plant in spring or autumn and water regularly. Coriander may flower and set seed when the weather is hot.

Parsley - all parts of the plant, leaves root, stems and seed are useful. Parsley is a very common ingredient for cooking and natural remedies. Plant seedlings any time of year or seed when the weather is warm. Parsley will grow for around two years and then set seed. Parsley loves winter. When all else is brown, forlorn and frostbitten, parsley will bring a vibrant green abundance to the garden.

Further information on this topic

'The Permaculture Home Garden', Linda Woodrow, Penguin Books Australia, 1996.

'Herbs – their cultivation and usage', John and Rosemary Hemphill, Allen & Unwin, 2007.

Canberra Organic Growers Society, www.cogs.asn.au
