

Mental Health Monday: Herb Gardening

Herbal Benefits

Herbs provide many benefits including:

- a habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects.
- flavor to culinary dishes.
- medicinal value.



Herbs have also been researched for their impact on mental health. Certain species have been shown to have a positive impact for clients with diagnoses of depression, anxiety, chronic fatigue and other indicators that affect well-being.

An herb is typically classified as a plant that has either culinary or medicinal properties. The part of the plant that is used depends on the type of herb. Herbs may be harvested for their leaves, flowers or even roots. (Technically, seeds are considered spices.) Accurate plant identification is essential to use herbs safely.

Herbs can provoke curiosity and provide a relaxing experience through multiple senses. Here are some examples to consider:

- Sight: nasturtiums, lavender, anise hyssop
- Sound: bee balm
- Smell: rosemary, fennel, thyme, sage (plenty of others)
- Touch: lamb's ear, lemongrass
- Taste: basil, dill (many more)

Classification

Herbs can be annuals, biennials or perennials. Annuals can often be direct-seeded into the garden and will need to be replanted each year. Biennials last for two years, but it may be preferable to treat them as annuals and replant each year. Perennials will last multiple years though some are more sensitive to our winters and require protection.

Planting

Herbs can be grown successfully in the ground, in raised beds and in containers. They tend to be hardy to a variety of growing sites and do well in drier conditions than most vegetables. Herbs grown for flowers require a site with full sun. Herbs grown for their leaves can tolerate part-sun to part-shade. Gardeners who choose to plant herbs and vegetables together should be mindful of the different needs and ensure this can be accommodated in the chosen location.



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Herbs that re-seed abundantly or have rhizomatous roots can be problematic in a landscape if not contained. Mints are known to spread aggressively and should be grown in a container.

Many gardeners prefer growing herbs in containers to create a patio garden and improve accessibility for use in cooking. Additionally, sensitive containerized perennial herbs can be moved indoors during the winter.

Propagating

Begin with a healthy plant or seeds from a reputable source. Established perennial herbs can be propagated by cuttings. Using sterilized pruners, remove a 4-6-inch section of the fleshy new growth from the established plant. Insert the cut end of the stem into moist potting media. Keep the soil moist and the humidity high until roots develop; then transplant to the desired area. Some perennial herbs can be propagated by division and replanted separately.



Maintenance

Herbs grown for parts other than the flower should be deadheaded regularly. This will promote bushier growth and prevent the plants' energy from going to seed development.

Though herb care is similar to that of vegetables, they do tend to need less water and fertilizer. Too much water and fertilizer can cause plants to develop root rot.

Harvesting

Herbs can be used for many recipes, teas and other projects later in the year. Taking cuttings regularly during the growing season keeps plants from becoming overgrown. The cut stems can be hung upside down to dry in a protected area. When the leaves are crispy they can be packaged in an airtight container for later use.

Gardeners can experience improved well-being in the garden by selecting plants that support their goals. Herb gardening is scalable to any size and location making it a welcomed addition to the home.



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