

Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme

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So of these famous herbs from a popular song (Simon & Garfunkel, *Scarborough Fair*, 1966, just in case you don't recall), only parsley does not qualify as WaterWise. The other three—sage, rosemary, thyme—in addition to many other herbs are more additions to the WaterWise plant palette for much of Oregon. Their forms are varied, from upright, robust forms popular for culinary use, to prostrate, carpet, and other forms favored for ornamental use. All will help make a fine stew, but the cultivars are highly ornamental additions to edible landscapes as well as garden features in their own right.

First, sage. The website at <http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn> defines sage in several ways. The first is “a mentor in spiritual and philosophical topics who is renowned for profound wisdom.” Indeed someone with this kind of experience could be helpful in our gardening practices. However, perhaps the more relevant definition is “any of various plants of the genus *Salvia*; a cosmopolitan herb.” The herbal species, *Salvia*, is native to the Mediterranean and has grayish-green leaves. This color is due to whitish hairs on the green leaves. The hairs and the resulting lighter color help reflect light and keep the plant cool in its native environment. The flowers are an attractive bluish purple on short spikes. The genus is quite large, as many as 900 species. Even of the culinary type, many different cultivars add to garden interest, including the tricolor sage (green, yellow, and white), ‘Purpurascens’ with purple leaves, and ‘Alba’ with white flowers (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvia>).

Rosemary, *Rosmarinus officianalis*, is evergreen with dark green, needle-like leaves, and a strong aromatic fragrance. Although rosemary can survive many years in the ground and can be pruned to manage its size, it is perhaps best kept in a pot so it can be brought inside during the coldest part of the winter. The flowers are a medium blue (or pink or white), but unlike sage, these flowers appear along the entire stem at intervals. Many cultivars of rosemary are available, popular ones being prostrate rather than upright. For more information about cultivars and growing conditions, visit <http://extension.uidaho.edu/idahogardens/tsv/pdfs/Rosemary.pdf>.

Then there is thyme—so many kinds with so many uses. The culinary type or common thyme is *Thymus vulgaris*, native to the Mediterranean. According to the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, this is not the only one used for cooking, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thyme>. Others are especially popular for landscaping are the creeping kind, including wooly thyme (*Thymus praecox* ssp. *arcticus* ‘Lanuginosus’) and creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*). Find out more about the 400 or more species at <http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/1997/4-4-1997/thyme.html>.



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