

## Five Warm Season Herbs

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Herbs include some of the easiest plants to grow. In addition to culinary uses, herbs offer fragrance, oils that deter feeding pests, and flowers that support pollinators. While a few herbs are hardy enough to be perennial in the Klamath Basin, others will be annuals in our area, to be enjoyed primarily in the warm months. Some tender herbs can be overwintered indoors over winter, but the results are often disappointing, especially when attempted without supplemental lighting. Most culinary herbs perform best in full sunlight, difficult to replicate indoors.

Like warm season vegetables, herbs considered “warm season” thrive best when air and soil temperatures are consistently above 60F. Herbs benefit from cold night protection in the same way that vegetables do, one reason many Klamath gardeners are inclined to try growing them indoors. Herb gardeners often remove developing buds from plants to prolong the length of time leaves can be harvested. University of Nevada Extension reports that the optimum picking time for most leafy herbs is right as flower buds start to open. As seed develops, flavor is changed, diminishing culinary value. One approach to having herbs for both culinary use and pollinator enhancement is to have multiple plants, allowing some to bloom right away while trimming buds off others for use in the kitchen. For more detail on when to harvest specific herbs, check out U of N’s publication on harvesting and preserving culinary herbs: <https://extension.unr.edu/publication.aspx?PubID=2755>.

**Basil.** Among the most tender of annual herbs, basil is easily damaged in cold, and cool weather can dramatically slow its rate of growth. Once the plant gets going, regular pinching of leaves is the best way to encourage more leaves to continue to develop. Two shoots will develop from each place leaves were pinched. Later in the summer, entire stems can be removed from the plant. Basil is a great pollinator attractor, so grow extra to allow flowering if pollinator support is part of your gardening plan. Basil occasionally gets aphids, but is otherwise usually free of insect pests.

**Dill.** Much hardier than basil, Dill performs ok in cool weather, but really takes off as temperatures rise. Both the leaves and seeds of this plant are commonly used for cooking and seasoning- far fewer people realize that the flowers are also edible. Dill is very easy to grow, is attractive to pollinators, and its flowers even last in a vase as cut stems. Pay attention to the variety you are purchasing to make sure it’s appropriate for its allotted space: there are cultivars from one to six feet tall. ‘Fernleaf’ is one of the more compact varieties that might perform well in a container.

**Summer Savory.** This lesser- known member of the mint family is often referred to as the “bean herb”, giving a clue to one of its common uses. Because this plant grows quickly, it is often direct seeded outside. However, the seeds take up to twenty-one days to germinate- possibly longer in cool soils- so Klamath Gardeners will probably benefit from starting these plants indoors to be transplanted. Leaves should be harvested before the plants go into flower. Harvest a complete stem, then remove the leaves by stripping them from the stem with fingers. Savory is delicious with grilled fish and in soups. Its small leaves make it easy to dry quickly.

**Marjoram.** Oregano’s timid cousin, marjoram plants are more cold- tender than oregano, with a similar but more subtle flavor. Perennial in warm climates, marjoram is grown like an annual where winters are

harsh. The foliage can be cut frequently, and is easy to use both fresh and dried. Rather than attempting to overwinter plants outside, it may be helpful to cut sprigs in fall, root cuttings indoors, and re-plant the following spring. Marjoram plants start off slow growers, becoming more vigorous in warm weather.

**Lemon Balm.** This member of the mint family has a bad reputation for invasiveness in southern climates, but is too tender to become invasive in the Klamath Basin. The seed needs light to germinate, so should not be planted deeply- just pressed into the soil. Under best conditions, germination is erratic and slow- so buying a plant start is likely to be less frustrating in our short growing season. Adding a sprig to iced or hot tea imparts a mild lemon favor. The plant has few insect or disease issues, but leaves will turn brown and crinkly in too-intense sun. Unlike most other members of the mint family, lemon balm prefers light shade.