

Possible to have garden-fresh herbs all year

By Melinda Myers

Enjoy herbs all year. Harvest herbs now for garden-fresh meals and preserve a few for next winter.

Snip a few leaves or leaf-covered stems as needed. For the same intensity of flavor, you generally need two to three times more fresh herbs than dried except for rosemary which has an equally strong flavor fresh or dried. Continue harvesting herbs as needed throughout the growing season. And don't worry about harming the plant because regular harvesting encourages new growth which means more for you to harvest. Just be sure to leave enough foliage to maintain plant growth.

You can remove as much as 50 percent of the foliage from annual herb plants. This is about when the plants near their final height. You can remove up to one-third from established perennial plants that have been in the garden for several months or more. Harvest when the plant has formed buds, but before they open into flowers for the greatest concentration of flavor. This is the perfect time to harvest herbs you plan to preserve.



Preserving herbs from the garden provides fresh-from-

the-garden flavor all year.

Photo/Bonnie Plants

Use a pair of garden scissors or pruners for faster and easier harvesting. Make your cuts above a set of healthy leaves to keep the plants looking good. Then preserve the flavor and zest of herbs with proper storage and preservation.

Store thin leafy herbs like parsley and cilantro for up to a week in the refrigerator. Place in a jar of water, like a flower arrangement, and loosely cover with a plastic bag. Keep basil out of the fridge to avoid discoloration and others on the counter for quick and frequent use.

Wrap dry thicker-leafed herbs like sage and thyme in a paper towel, set inside a plastic bag and place in a warmer section of the refrigerator.

Freeze sprigs, whole leaves or chopped clean herbs on a cookie sheet. Or pack clean diced herbs in ice cube trays and fill the empty spaces with water. These are great for use in soups and stews. Store the frozen herbs and ice cubes in an airtight container or baggie in the freezer.

Or bundle several stems together, secure with a rubber band and use a spring type clothespin to hang them in a warm dry place to dry. Make your own drying rack from an old embroidery hoop, string and S hooks. Visit Bonnie Plants do-it-yourself Herb Drying Rack project for detailed instructions.

Get creative and use some of your herbs to make a fragrant edible wreath. Use fresh herbs that are flexible and easier to shape into a wreath. They will dry in place and can be harvested as needed.

Speed up the drying process in the microwave. Place herbs on a paper towel-covered paper plate. Start with one to two minutes on high. Repeat for 30 seconds as needed until the herbs are brittle.

Store dried herbs in an airtight plastic or glass jar.

Keep enjoying these fresh-from-the-garden flavors throughout the remainder of the season. And consider preserving a few for you, your family and friends to enjoy throughout the winter.

Gardening expert Melinda Myers has written over 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening" and the "Midwest Gardener's Handbook." She hosts "How to Grow Anything: Food Gardening For Everyone" DVD set and the nationally syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment TV and radio segments.