

Growing Herbs Indoors



Whether growing herbs for cooking, fragrance, or their aesthetic qualities, bringing them indoors can provide year round enjoyment. Many herbs do well indoors, however, some will not be happy. Here we will highlight the best choices for growing inside. Indoors, they will need conditions similar to what they prefer outdoors; bright sunlight, containers with drain holes, a well drained potting mix, water, and food.

LIGHT: Indoor herbs prefer a south or west facing window. Winter light is less intense than at other times of the year, so a supplemental light source will make them happy. When selecting a plant light, it is important to make sure the bulbs emit "full spectrum" light. The newer T5 types are affordable, easy to find, fairly inconspicuous, and energy efficient.

WATER: The needs of each herb should be considered when watering. Growing plants will require more water, as do plants in clay pots. During the winter, plants require less moisture than in summer, and should be watered less frequently. Take care not to allow roots to sit in soggy soil, as they won't be able to breathe, and may begin to rot. Always feel the soil before watering. When the soil feels dry to the touch, water thoroughly; until water runs through, so that all of the roots are moistened. Some herbs like to be evenly moist, while others like to be on the drier side. Check the list to the right if you're not sure.

HUMIDITY: During the winter, the air indoors can become very dry. To supplement humidity, you can place potted plants on a tray of pebbles and water (make sure the pot bottoms are not sitting in the water.) Grouping plants together will also help increase the humidity around them. Misting is not recommended, as this can increase the risk of disease.

TEMPERATURE: While most herbs tolerate temps between 45 and 75, they prefer 60 - 70 degrees to thrive while indoors.

FEEDING: Outdoors we recommend a weekly feeding with Fish Emulsion, or monthly with Espoma Plant-Tone. Indoors, use a good quality all-purpose water soluble plant food mixed at half the recommended rate, once each month. You can increase the frequency of feeding as spring approaches & daylight hours lengthen.

INSECTS: Healthy, well tended plants are far less likely to have insect or disease issues. Keep a close eye on your plants, and if an issue with insects should arise, treat weekly for three or four weeks with Insecticidal Soap, Neem Oil, or Spinosad. These are approved for use on food crops, the latter two being organic. Soap & Neem Oil are approved for indoor use. As a precaution, plants should always be treated for insects before bringing them in from outside.

DISEASE: Meeting a plant's need with proper care & good air circulation go a long way in preventing disease. Powdery Mildew is the most common disease issue with herbs, though not the only potential problem. Diseases often arise when plants are weak & their needs are not being met, or when insects are present. Outdoors, sulphur or copper based fungicides are the best measure. Indoors, spray every few days with a mixture of 1 tsp baking soda to 1 gallon of tepid water. Continue treatments until the symptoms no longer persist.

HERBS TO GROW INDOORS:

BASIL likes the sunniest possible position & tolerates dry air. It prefers to be warm, and should be kept away from drafts. Basil will wilt readily if too the soil gets dry. Pinch often for a bushier plant & to keep it from flowering.

BAY is one of the easiest herbs to grow indoors. Slow growing, it is tolerant of a wide variety of situations, short of being constantly wet or in low light.

CHIVES like to be well fed & watered, & kept in bright light.

MINTS, LEMON BALM, & CATNIP like evenly moist soil & a cool location. They like rich soil & should be fed more frequently. Cut back often.

OREGANO grows very well in pots. They like to be kept evenly moist, but not wet, and thrive in bright light. Pinch back to shape.

PARSLEY prefers to be kept cool (around 60 degrees), and should be kept evenly moist, in bright light. Established plants in deeper pots tend to fair better indoors, once tap roots have been allowed to develop.

TARRAGON likes full sun, but will tolerate less. It needs a cool period for rest (a week or two) before coming indoors.

THYME, LAVENDER, & ROSEMARY do best in bright light. They tolerate cool conditions, but like high humidity. Allow the soil to dry slightly between waterings. Rosemary will adjust best from outdoors, if first given a couple weeks in a partly shaded area before bringing it in.