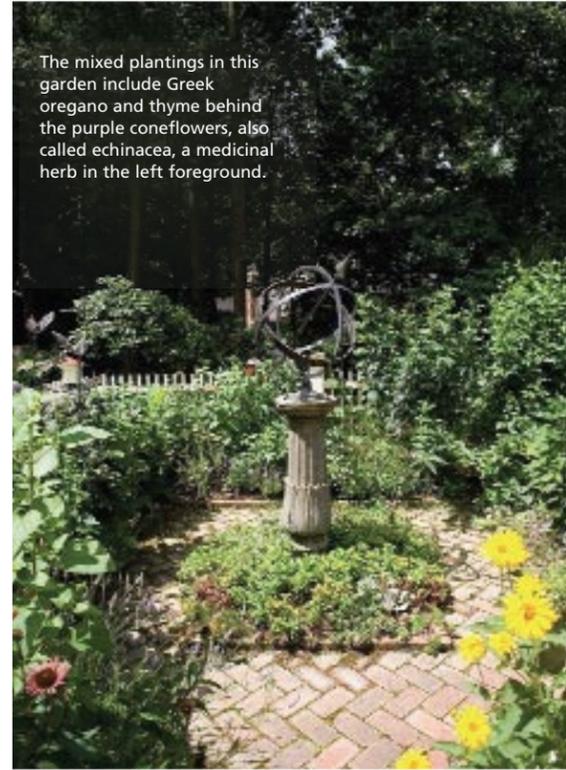




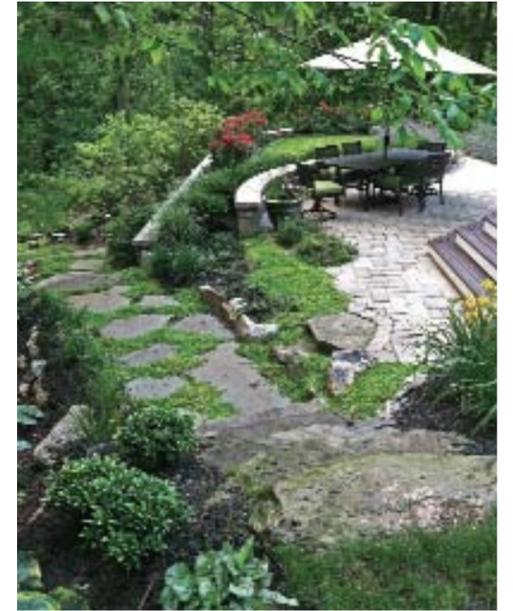
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Top: The blooms of chives (left foreground) and cilantro (right foreground) put sparks of white in a mixed planting of ornamental plants, herbs and vegetables.

Above: The spiky red flowers of pineapple sage frame the gate to this garden with a mix of plants including marigolds and vegetables (tomatoes are in the right background).

Thyme for Something Different?

Culinary herbs can fill out your landscape as well as your recipes **BY MARY VINNEDGE**

YOU CAN PUT A PUNCH in your landscape and your menus at the same time with culinary herbs. We got three gardening experts to rattle off the following list of benefits to growing your own.

You'll have fresh herbs at the ready. "We're a foodie nation now with all of the celebrity chefs and TV cooking shows," says Peg Reynolds of Reynolds Garden Shop in Manahawkin. She and Christopher Stout of Dear Garden Associates Inc. in Princeton and Pipersville, Pennsylvania, suggest planting herbs near indoor and outdoor kitchens so they're handy as you prepare meals.

You'll know the herbs weren't grown with toxic chemicals, says Drew Madlinger of Madlinger Exterior Design in Branchburg. (He recommends feeding with Garden-tone, an all-natural organic fertilizer from New Jersey-based Espoma. Don't overfertilize, which dilutes flavor; most herbs should be fed no more than every other week.) Reynolds notes that U.S. Department of Agriculture certified-organic starter plants are available to be sure you're chemical-free. In addition, many herbs can be grown from seed.

You'll save money. "Have you seen the prices on those little packages of herbs in supermarkets?"

Reynolds asks. For dishes such as basil pesto, the savings can be considerable. A packet of herb seeds that can produce bushels of leaves costs \$2 or so; a few basil leaves can be \$3.

The herbs' fragrance adds dimension to your landscape. "Brush against them and you have that nice scent," Reynolds says.

A bonus is that herbs are easy to grow: They adapt to most soils except tight clay and usually aren't deer fodder because of their pungent scents. Few insects bother them. "Amend the soil so it's not too rich," Madlinger says, probably with decomposed granite or

Above left: The center pot includes basil, parsley, oregano and thyme. It's flanked at left by a pot containing the ornamental dipladenia and at right by a pineapple plant.

Above right: Low-growing, aromatic thyme is tough enough to thrive between stones of a driveway or sidewalk.

12 Easy-Growing Herbs

These culinary herbs are favorites of Christopher Stout of Dear Garden Associates, Drew Madlinger of Madlinger Exterior Design and Peg Reynolds of Reynolds Garden Shop. Primetime for snipping herbs is before their bloom periods and in the mornings, when oils are concentrated. Except as noted, herbs generally require full sun (six or more hours daily) and excellent drainage. To help perennial herbs survive a hard winter, in late fall cover the surrounding soil with a thick layer (3 inches or so) of mulch such as coarsely shredded bark. Stout also suggests rotating your annual herb crops to avoid depleting soil nutrients.

HERB	PLANTING INFO	LANDSCAPE USES	CULINARY USES	COMMENTS
 <p>basil (annual)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 12 to 30 inches SPREAD: 9 to 12 inches SOIL: Moderately rich</p>	<p>Insert in borders with flowering plants; great in containers.</p>	<p>Pesto, tomato sauces/soups, salads, pizza, fish, biscuits, gelato, cocktails, lemon basil ice cubes for tea.</p>	<p>Easy to grow from seed; can root from cuttings. Hates cold; needs more water and feeding than most herbs. Pinch out flowers to keep foliage growing. Many varieties: lemon, Thai, purple, 'Red Rubin' (red foliage), 'Cardinal' (red flower, green leaves), 'Boxwood' (short, bushy).</p>
 <p>chives (perennial)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 12 to 18 inches SPACE: 9 to 12 inches apart SOIL: Rich preferred</p>	<p>Use as you would ornamental grass; can grow in containers.</p>	<p>Baked potatoes, salads, deviled eggs, soups — whenever you want a hint of onion flavor.</p>	<p>Spreads aggressively; remove pink flowers (late spring) to control reseeding. Can be dried.</p>
 <p>cilantro (annual)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 16 to 36 inches SPREAD: 12 to 18 inches SOIL: Average to rich</p>	<p>Insert in borders with bolder flowering plants; grow in containers.</p>	<p>Tortilla soup, salsas, guacamole, other Mexican dishes and Asian dishes.</p>	<p>White flowers appear when soil temperature exceeds 75° Fahrenheit; pinch them out to encourage foliage. Its seed is coriander. To some people, cilantro tastes bad/soapy.</p>
 <p>dill (annual)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 18 to 40 inches SPREAD: 12 to 18 inches SOIL: Loose, sandy to moderately rich</p>	<p>In borders; delicate foliage and flowers can be a nice counterpoint to coarse foliage.</p>	<p>Pickling, salmon, potato dishes.</p>	<p>Easy to grow from seed; re-seeds freely and widely (move seedlings). Yellow flower clusters (to about 3 inches across) are umbrella-like. Pinch out flowers to encourage foliage.</p>
 <p>garlic (annual)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 8 to 25 inches SPACE: 6 to 8 inches apart SOIL: Average to rich</p>	<p>Can replace ornamental grasses; makes a nice edging and discourages deer.</p>	<p>Pesto; soups/stews; Italian, Asian, Mexican dishes.</p>	<p>Plant offsets in the fall about five weeks before frost is expected. Spherical bloom clusters in early summer. After leaves start to decline, stop watering. Harvest in June or July by digging. Brush off loose soil, leave stalks and roots on bulbs and hang to dry. Store in a cool, dark, dry place; mesh bags help maintain quality.</p>

HERB	PLANTING INFO	LANDSCAPE USES	CULINARY USES	COMMENTS
 <p>mint (perennial)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 6 to 35 inches (typically 12 to 18) SPREAD: 12 to 24 inches SOIL: Average</p>	<p>Confined areas or containers are best; low-growing varieties can be a groundcover.</p>	<p>Mojitos and other cocktails, tabbouleh, lemonade, desserts, freeze in ice cubes and add to drinks; peppermint tea soothes upset tummies.</p>	<p>Spreads aggressively (even out the bottoms of pots). Many varieties, including lemon, apple, spearmint, peppermint; chocolate mint tolerates wet soil. Mountain mint will grow in dense shade.</p>
 <p>Greek oregano (perennial)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 12 to 24 inches SPREAD: 12 to 18 inches SOIL: Average to poor</p>	<p>Can serve as a low shrub.</p>	<p>Marinades, chicken, pizza and other Italian foods.</p>	<p>Attractive white flowers in mid-summer. Harvest leaves by dragging fingers along stems; can be dried. Highly deer-resistant.</p>
 <p>parsley (annual)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 12 to 14 inches SPREAD: 12 to 14 inches SOIL: Moderately rich</p>	<p>Attractive in container with flowering plants.</p>	<p>Tabbouleh, salad dressings, soups, crumb crusts for meats/poultry, garnish.</p>	<p>Flat- and curly-leaved varieties available. Bunnies and swallowtail butterfly caterpillars feast on parsley. Some gardeners set aside a few plants for caterpillars and move all larvae to those plants.</p>
 <p>rosemary (perennial)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 36 to 72 inches (typically 36 to 48) SPREAD: 18 to 24 inches SOIL: Prefers sandy soil, but adaptable</p>	<p>Can be massed; in borders, plant in back because lower stems tend to become woody/unattractive after a few years (grow something else in front).</p>	<p>Roasted chicken, beef, potatoes, sauces, breads (focaccia).</p>	<p>The attractive trailing variety is less hardy. Lavender blooms appear on the leafy stems (typically early spring). Can grow from softwood cuttings. Tall ones can take a severe pruning. Needs excellent drainage. Highly deer-resistant. Dried rosemary can be preferable (milder flavor).</p>
 <p>sage (perennial)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: most varieties 12 to 24 inches, pineapple sage to 48 inches SPREAD: 24 to 36 inches SOIL: Moderately rich</p>	<p>Great plant in borders and containers; pretty enough to be an accent plant.</p>	<p>Stuffings; turkey, lamb and other meats; cheese; freeze pineapple sage in ice cubes for tea, water, lemonade; use pineapple sage in salads.</p>	<p>Attractive foliage (gray-green and variegated cultivars); lovely rosy-purple (sometimes white) blooms in late spring/early summer. Pineapple sage has red flowers and is especially deer-resistant.</p>
 <p>French tarragon (perennial)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 24 to 36 inches SPREAD: 12 to 15 inches SOIL: Sandy loam</p>	<p>Great in window box, planter or along front edge of border; grows up and then tumbles over.</p>	<p>Salmon and other fish, chicken, chicken salad, egg dishes, stews.</p>	<p>Can freeze out; seed is sterile so grow from cuttings or divisions. Overfertilizing will dilute flavor. Russian tarragon has much less flavor.</p>
 <p>thyme (perennial)</p>	<p>HEIGHT: 6 to 10 inches SPREAD: up to 24 inches SOIL: Prefers rocky soil</p>	<p>Use where you want a fine texture; often planted between steppingstones and driveway stones.</p>	<p>Chicken, turkey, soups; lemon variety is great on poultry and beef.</p>	<p>Broadleaf English, narrow-leaf French, mother-of-thyme, lemon and lime varieties are popular. Creeping thyme is not culinary. Thymes have a great scent when stepped on. Must have excellent drainage.</p>

More Palate-Pleasers

Here are nine additional culinary herbs at least one of our garden experts recommends

bee balm (a.k.a. monarda) tolerates a little shade and damp locations. Native to New Jersey, it's a hummingbird and butterfly magnet. Use in tea, pizza, salads, breads. Bee balm grows 3 to 6 feet tall, 2 to 4 feet wide and can be invasive. Perennial.



sweet bay is a shrub that's also a terrific houseplant; keep it out of direct sunlight. Snip a leaf and throw it into chicken soup, says Christopher Stout of Dear Garden Associates. Hang entire branches to dry in dark places such as closets and let dry two to three weeks. This frost-tender plant is best grown in pots moved indoors during winter; water every two to three weeks. In ideal conditions, sweet bay can reach 60 feet tall, but in pots, you can keep it the size of a small or medium bush.



fennel has an anise flavor; all parts of the plant are edible. Its feathery fronds (on celery-like stalks) can reach more than 5 feet tall and 4 to 5 feet wide. The root can season soups and stews, roasted pork, sea bass, chicken and salads; seeds are used in Italian sausage, rye bread and Chinese five-spice powder. Perennial.



lemongrass is a popular seasoning in Thai and Vietnamese cuisine. Its citrusy flavor enhances fish, seafood, chicken, stews and curries (remove the lemongrass before serving). It reaches 4 to 6 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet wide. It's a tender perennial; grow as an annual.



lavender delicately flavors the seasoning herbes de Provence and baked goods (cakes, cookies). A natural moth repellent, lavender can have green or gray foliage. Its dried blossoms retain their color. Mature size is 1 to 3 feet tall and wide. This semievergreen perennial has a wonderful fragrance; Drew Madlinger suggests 'Grosso' and 'Provence' varieties for New Jersey.



nasturtiums grow 6 to 12 inches tall and 6 to 9 inches wide. The blossoms (usually yellow, coral, orange or red) add a peppery zing to salads and pasta dishes. The lily-petal-like leaves of some varieties are variegated cream-and-green. It's a cool-season annual.



lemon verbena gives lemony flavor to foods without adding liquid. It's used in poultry and fish dishes, beverages (including herbal teas), salads, desserts and jams. Put it near the back of borders because it reaches 3 to 6 feet tall and wide. Tender perennial; grow as an annual.



violas can be used in foods in many ways but most often are dropped into salads or beverages or pressed into cake and cupcake icings. Violas taste sweet and come in an array of colors, including yellows, purples and creams. Depending on variety, they reach a few inches to 1 foot tall and wide. Violas are cool-season, reseeding perennials often grown as annuals. *Viola sororia* is the state flower of New Jersey.



Spikes of lavender (left foreground) bring a nice textural contrast to this garden.

chamomile can be made into a relaxing tea. Daisy-like flowers are lovely in planting beds; regular varieties can be 1 to 2 feet tall, and dwarfs, 6 to 8 inches; allow 1 to 2 feet between plants. There are annual and perennial varieties, but German chamomile (used for tea) is generally considered an annual.



sand (not peat) to promote drainage. Most are drought-tolerant sun-worshippers so don't overwater. But they're not cactus either, Stout warns — "they can't go four weeks without water."

Madlinger also provides herbs with ample air circulation. Basil and mints, for instance, can suffer from powdery mildew, which he treats by wiping the leaves with horticultural oil.

The free-flowing shapes of most herbs make them ideal for informal landscapes, although some — such as thymes between steppingstones and rosemary pruned as topiary — work well in formal designs too.

"I personally have herbs all throughout my yard, especially staples like basil, rosemary and sage," Reynolds says. "It's easy to get so many colors and textures with herbs. I stick them in everywhere. They're great for plugging gaps in the landscape. They don't cost a lot, and they spread like crazy."

But Reynolds concedes "they can be a little rambly for someone who likes a manicured look." She cuts them back to keep them full. Or as Stout suggests, you can keep a formal landscape but grow herbs in containers (put gravel or clay pot shards at the bottom for drainage) on decks, patios, porches and even

in planting beds. If you grow large culinary herbs such as rosemary and lemon verbena in pots, he suggests using one plant per pot.

"The trick is to look at the landscape plan aesthetically and functionally at the same time," Madlinger says. Meet herbs' basic needs for soil, sun, water and nutrients, he adds, and "they grow almost like weeds." **DNJ**

Mary Vinnege is an award-winning garden writer based north of Dallas-Fort Worth. She loves having basil and rosemary in her landscape and her dinners.

Herbal Lessons

Christopher Stout, manager/client liaison at Dear Garden Associates, recommends these primers on growing herbs:

Kitchen Garden Planner (Country Home, 1999) by Darrell Trout.

The Herbalist's Garden (Storey Communications, 2001) by Shatoiya and Richard De La Tour.

Herb Garden Design (Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2003) by Ethne Clarke.