



THYME FOR THE MILLENNIUM

As if beauty, utility, and fragrance weren't enough, the list of herbal attributes includes being easy to grow. In fact, most herbs will not only survive but thrive in conditions considered intolerable by many other plants.

Designer basil and thymes give culinary artists a range of choices while hardy lavenders with multiple growing habits and as many nuances of color and fragrance enchant those who find them therapeutic for body or spirit. For adventurous gardeners interested in expanding their herbal inventory, here are a few suggestions:

Allium sativum (Garlic) is as well-known for repelling vampires as it is for being essential in the kitchen. It's been used throughout history as an antibiotic, and is grown as a perennial bulb. *A. fistulosum* (Welsh onion) is more like a giant chive with its pencil-thick hollow stems that can be stuffed with savory fillings. Quite hardy, they grow up to 36" tall and all parts are edible. Another useful variety is *A. ampeloprosom* (Elephant Garlic) which is milder than the small garlic and ideal for roasting in olive oil.

Angelica archangelica (Angelica or the Holy Plant) is native to Europe and Asia. Though the seeds, stems and leaves are strongly aromatic of anise and considered by some to be edible, it's now used primarily for ornamental purposes. It grows to nearly six feet in height, making it a perfect background for shorter plants. Years ago, it was considered the strongest known antidote to witchcraft and seems worth growing simply for its elegant name.

Foeniculum vulgare (Fennel) is quite a pet with celebrity chefs. A member of the parsley family, it's prized for its anise flavor and all of its parts are considered edible. The variety 'Rubrum' is known as bronze or smoky fennel and is a spectacular cultivar that can also be consumed or simply used to frame white flowering plants. Growing to over four feet, it's perennial in this climate and, since it can be extremely invasive, it should be put where it can be easily controlled.

Lavandula augustifolia (Lavender) will thrive in sunny areas of your garden but it absolutely must be well-drained. Available in dozens of cultivars that offer varied color, early and late blooming, and intense scent, these small gray-leaved perennials should be planted in a soil mixture that includes crushed lava rock or some similar material so that their roots and crowns will be completely free of moist conditions. L. a. 'Munstead Dwarf' blooms early and grows only 12" while L.a. 'Jean Davis' has prolific pinkish white flowers.

Levisticum officinale (Lovage) was popular years ago in England to where it was introduced from its native Mediterranean mountains. Very hardy, this tall perennial will tolerate semi-shade and moist conditions. With its delicate flavor that goes well with tomatoes, it's a handy herb to have on hand when you've forgotten to buy celery.

Melissa officinalis (Lemon balm) is native to the Mediterranean but a very hardy perennial up to Zone 4. Wonderful for teas, its lemon scent is considered one of the most refreshing in nature. It can be used as a substitute for lemon zest in cooking and baking and also for potpourris. Growing to 14" or so, and looking like a larger cousin of mint, it can be somewhat invasive.

Ocimum basilicum (Basil) is considered by many chefs to be the most indispensable of flavors and is considered safe for all culinary uses. Coming in over one hundred varieties, basil is tender in this climate and must be treated as an annual or as a potted plant. Try some of the more unusual ones including O. b. 'Clove', 'Cinnamon', and 'Minimum'.

Poterium sanguisorba (Salad burnet) is a hardy perennial reaching one to two feet. As its name implies, the young leaves are wonderful used in salads but can also be used in herbal butters, cream cheese, and vinegars as well.

Thymus (Thyme) comes in many varieties, mostly low creeping perennial plants but some that grow several inches tall. *T. x citriodorus* (Lemon thyme), *T. Herba-barona* (Caraway thyme), and *T. vulgaris* 'Frangrantissimus' (Orange thyme) are a few of the best for cooking.

They can also be incorporated in lawn areas where mowing will send waves of their fragrance about the yard.

Viola odorata (Violet) is a plant that can restore your faith in existence. When it seems the rest of the world has lost its mind, there's something reassuring in this dear little perennial. Its sweet fragrant flowers bloom quite early in spring, despite the harshest of winters, and a fresh bouquet of them will scent an entire room. They can also be used in potpourris.

Legends and myths surround all of these ancient herbs. Though ethnobotanists, pharmaceutical chemists, physicians and anthropologists work to reveal their true secrets of healing, science will never remove their poetry.

Come in for suggestions and help with growing herbs.

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JOHNSON'S NURSERY
11753 EAST MAIN STREET
EAST AURORA NY 14052

Phone: (716)652-8969

www.johnsonsnurserycenter.com

e-mail: nursery@johnsonsnurserycenter.com