



**Appalachia-Science  
in the Public Interest**

50 Lair St., Mt. Vernon, KY 40456

**ASPI TECHNICAL SERIES TP 62**

# Herb Growing in Appalachia

Cultivating herbs has been practiced for millennia. Many native herbs have been gathered in our Appalachian region, but MOST residents would now like to combine native harvesting and cultivating skills for a greater selection of herbs for seasoning and medicinal remedies. While we favor using native plants for these purposes, we realize that people would like to experience a variety of native and non-native plants, provided the non-natives will not escape and become invasive.

ASPI has grown herbs from the beginning, but mostly for use by residents on the property and by interested parties. A formal "perennial" garden with a dozen rock-lined beds has existed since 1993 at the demonstration center. The particular varieties we have grown and used include: basil, chamomile, chives, comfrey (a member of the borage family), dill, horseradish, mint varieties, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, wild strawberry, and thyme. Others listed below are being introduced.



*ASPI's herb garden*

## Criteria Used for Selecting the Herb Species

- ✕ Ease of cultivating: herbs that do not require tilling of the soil each year or many soil amendments.
- ✕ Ease of storage and transportation: herbs that can be easily dehydrated and good to use in that form.
- ✕ Hardiness: plants that would not require transplanting to greenhouses and cold frames over winter.
- ✕ Popularity: herbs for which a market or potential market exists.
- ✕ Safety: plants without toxic parts.
- ✕ Usefulness: herbs used in teas or having culinary value.

## Features of the Thirty-Four Species of Favorite Herbs

Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*  
easily started from seed  
will self-seed  
sweet scent  
mild tea  
- Nichols (seeds (s))

Angelica *Angelica archangelica*  
candy stems for decorating desserts  
heavy producer per square foot  
- Nichols (s) (plants (p))

Bee balm, white *Monarda clinopodia*

Anise *Pimpinella anisum*  
easy to care for  
licorice flavored leaves and seeds  
- Liberty ; - Nichols

Basil *Ocimum basilicum*  
popular culinary herb  
grows easily from seed  
- Durhams (p)  
- Liberty  
- Nichols; - Peaceful Valley

herb native to Kentucky  
easy to grow  
makes a fragrant tea

Bergamot, wild *Monarda fistulosa*  
herb native to Kentucky  
easy to grow  
makes a fragrant tea  
(grows in area)  
- Nichols

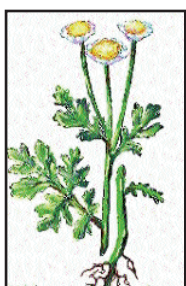


Betony *Stachys officinalis*  
leaves are a substitute for black tea  
beautiful purple spikes  
needs little care

Borage *Borago officinalis*  
crisp cucumber flavor  
stems used like celery  
blue star-shaped blossoms  
can be candied or eaten fresh  
good companion plant  
grows easily from seed, readily reseeds  
- Liberty; - Nichols

Caraway *Carum carvi*  
easily cultivated from seed  
every part of plant edible  
- Nichols; - Park

Catnip *Nepeta cataria*  
sturdy plant  
- Liberty  
- Nichols  
(s) (p)  
- Park



Chamomile *Chamaemelum nobile*  
good low-growing ground cover  
this species of chamomile  
is a short perennial  
grows in almost any type of soil  
good companion plant  
extremely hardy  
- Nichols (German Chamomile); - Park

Chives  
hardy perennial  
(garden supply stores)

Comfrey  
hardy perennial  
good for ornamental purposes  
(purple flower)  
leaves used for exterior inflammation  
fast growing and used for green manure

Coriander *Coriandrum sativum*  
seed, leaf, and root all used in cooking  
companion plant  
- Liberty; - Nichols  
- Park; - Peaceful Valley

Costmary *Chrysanthemum balsamita*  
easily-spreading perennial  
short drying time  
stores well for long periods of time  
- Nichols

Dill *Anethum graveolens*  
popular herb  
companion plant  
- Durhams (plants); Liberty Seed Company  
- Nichols; - Park  
- Peaceful Valley

Dittany *Cunila origanoides*  
herb native to Kentucky

Fenugreek *Trigonella foenum-graecum*  
one of the oldest and most widely used herbs  
makes an imitation maple syrup  
easy to grow  
rarely bothered by pests and disease  
- Nichols

Ginger, wild *Asarum canadense*  
local plant  
strong ginger flavor  
- Nichols

Horehound *Marrubium vulgare*  
hardy perennial  
grows easily  
needs little water  
- Nichols (s) (p)  
- Park



Horseradish *Armoracia lapathifolia*  
perennial  
grows easily  
winter gathering  
- Park

Hyssop *Agastache foeniculum*  
**good economic potential**  
**produces well**  
**easy to harvest and dry**  
**makes a fine tea with a familiar, much-enjoyed flavor**  
 - Nichols (s) (p)



*Hyssop*

Lemon balm *Melissa officinalis*  
**attracts bees**  
**grows easily from seed**  
**easy and plentiful harvesting**  
**(possibly 3 cuttings per season)**  
 - Nichols; - Liberty

Lovage, black *Smyrniolus atrum*  
**celery substitute**  
**an important food in the first century**  
**simpler to grow**  
**dies back each winter and returns**  
**stronger the following summer**  
 - Nichols



*Mint*

Mint *Mentha* spp.  
**tough plant**  
**harvestable when it first comes up in spring**  
**multitude of uses**  
 - Park; - Liberty

Mint, mountain *Pycnanthemum incanum*  
**herb native to Kentucky**

Oregano *Origanum* spp.  
**popular perennial herb**  
**harvestable when plant reaches 6 " in height**  
 - Nichols; - Park; - Liberty

Parsley *Petroselinum crispum*  
**popular herb and garnish**  
**highly nutritious**  
 - Nichols; - Liberty  
 - Park  
 - Peaceful Valley

Rosemary *Rosmarinus officinalis*  
**popular perennial herb**  
**attracts bees**  
**harvesting can be done any time during the year**  
**heavy producer per square foot**  
 - Liberty  
 - Nichols Seeds (p)  
 - Park



*Rosemary*



Sage *Salvia officinalis*

Holt's Mammoth variety grows rapidly  
good for cutting and  
drying bulk quantities  
quick to germinate  
hardy perennial  
2 or 3 harvests a year are  
possible once established  
good companion plant

- Liberty
- Nichols
- Park



Sage

Savory *Satureja montana*

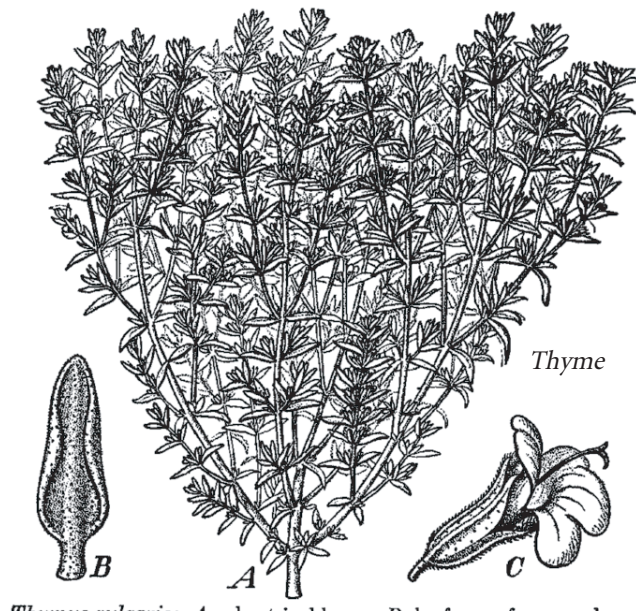
popular herb  
easy to grow from seed or cuttings

- Nichols (p)
- Park

Strawberry, wild *Fragaria virginiana*

native to Kentucky  
leaves used in tea

- Sandy Mush (p)



Thyme *Thymus vulgaris*

popular perennial herb  
attractive to bees  
good companion plant  
requires little care  
does well in poor soil

- Nichols (s) (p)
- Park (p)

Wintergreen *Gaultheria procumbens*

herb native to Kentucky  
grows well in partial shade

- Sandy Mush (p)

## Garden Layout Considerations

Planting perennials in separate beds from annuals that require yearly replanting.

Isolating rampant growers such as mints from other plants.

Planting groups of a given herb together.

Planting in descending order of plant height, with the tallest plants on the north side of the bed.

Matching the soil and sunlight conditions of each bed to the needs of the individual types of herbs.

Keeping beds no more than four feet across for easy tending and least soil compaction.

Taking advantage of companion plant relationships.

Designing layout according to aesthetics of plant shape, texture, and blossoms.

Creating a special section devoted to herbs native to Kentucky.

## **Perennial and Other Herb Advantages**

- ✕ Perennial herbs do not require plowing and replanting each year and thus result in less need for labor in cultivation and less soil erosion and nutrient depletion.
- ✕ Being closer genetically to wild plants, herbs are more resistant to insects and diseases; some even repel or discourage insect pests.
- ✕ When well established these provide their own weed control.
- ✕ The propagation, planting, and care of herb plants are not easily automated, so small farmers are not threatened by large agribusinesses in these areas. In addition, the processing of herbs largely necessitates hand labor, which can create jobs through local cottage industries.
- ✕ Perennial herbs require less water and fewer nutrients than conventional crops.
- ✕ Synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides cannot be used on plants grown for medicinal purposes. Small farmers are not threatened by large agribusinesses in the domain of herb-growing.
- ✕ The processing of herbs largely necessitates hand labor. This can create jobs through local cottage industries. Products well-suited for this include:

herbal vinegars and salad dressings  
dried culinary herbs and seasoning mixes  
herbal tea mixes  
candied or crystallized herbs  
herbal salves  
air fresheners  
essential oils  
scented candles or soaps  
catnip toys  
insect repellents

## **Marketing**

Herbal teas sales are some of the fastest growing commodities in supermarket history. The market for herbs that were locally-grown increased at an even faster rate and that pace has not slackened in recent years. However, the U.S. still imports far larger amounts of herbs and spices than it exports. In an age when alternative crops are sought for tobacco farmers and others, herb gardening seems quite promising.

Similar to ginseng-growing, a somewhat less difficult obstacle to new herb growers is the two-year period most perennial herbs require before harvesting can begin. The marketing machinery is not in place to guarantee

the future market as it is with other perennial crops such as fruit, and therefore normal financing is not available. Another disadvantage is the lack of information available relative to more traditional crops.

Types of marketing for the small farmer to consider, include: direct marketing at roadside stands, u-pick (not recommended in most herb growing areas due to damage), farmer's market, peddling (quite time consuming), local store or gift shop, natural foods store or co-op, or local restaurants. Bulk marketing could include 500 pound-minimum buyer, 5000 pound-minimum buyer and import-export houses.

## Sources

Nichols Garden Nursery 1-800-422-3985

Liberty Seed Company 1-800-541-6022, (330) 364-1611

Park Seed 1-800-845-3369

Sandy Mush Herb Nursery (704) 683-2014

Peaceful Valley Supply (916) 272-4769

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