The Denton County Master Gardener Association is a volunteer organization under the guidance of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Our mission is to provide information that encourages safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices.
Growing and using herbs in North Texas

A copy of this presentation is available at http://dcmga.com/events/handouts/

*non-attributed pictures are from a DCMGA member’s garden

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Topics

• Introduction
• About growing herbs
• Harvesting and storing herbs
• Detail on several herbs for North Texas
• Q&A

Note: a copy of this presentation and additional information about growing and using herbs is available at:

What is an Herb?

- Plant leaves used for flavoring food, as a medicine, or to add fragrance to perfumes. Herbs originate in temperate climates.
- Although the term, “spice” is sometimes used interchangeably with “herb”, spices are harvested from portions of the plant other than leaves including roots, flowers, fruits, seeds or bark. Spices are native to warm tropical climates and can be woody or herbaceous plants. Spices often are more potent and stronger flavored than herbs; as a result they typically are used in smaller amounts.*
- Herb plants may be an annual or a perennial in North Texas.

“Herbs vs. Spices”, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Services
Why Grow Herbs in the Home Garden?

• Have readily available for cooking. It is fun and rewarding to harvest fresh herbs and use them in meal preparation the same day.
• Economical to “grow your own.”
• Can dry or freeze fresh herbs for future use.
• Attractive in separate garden plot or mixed with veggies and/or flowers in landscape.
• Fragrance and color. Many herbs plant attract pollinators and beneficial insects.
Preferred Growing Conditions

• Sunny location—morning sun best. Some herbs tolerate partial or even full shade.
• Sufficient water but not too much—1 inch per week.
• Well drained soil—consider raised beds or containers for picky and aggressive herbs. Amend heavy clay soils with organic material and expanded shale.
• Apply a balanced fertilizer according to product directions.
• Control weeds.
• Add mulch to retain moisture. Moderate soil temperature and discourage weeds.
• Herbs are generally insect and disease resistant.
Harvesting Herbs

- Begin harvesting an herb when the plant has enough foliage to maintain growth. Up to 75% of the current season's growth can be harvested at one time.*
- Harvest warm season annuals before first frost.
- Harvest cool season annuals before weather gets hot.
- Herbs are most flavorful when picked in the morning just after the dew has dried from the leaves. Stop harvesting perennial herbs about one month before the first frost date.

*(NCSU Cooperative Extension Service)
Using Fresh or Dried Herbs in Recipes

• Fresh herbs are generally preferred for cooking and salad dressings.
• Common herbs, such as rosemary, thyme and oregano, are available from the garden almost all year.
• The same measurement of dried herbs is 3 times as strong as fresh.
• Delicate herbs, like basil, should be added at the end of cooking to maintain their flavor.
• Store dried herbs in an airtight container in a cool, dark space to retain flavor and fragrance.
• Dried herbs may be used in potpourris, sachets and as door decorations.
• Dried herbs maintain some flavor for about 1 year.*

Preparing Herbs for Cooking or Storage

• Remove leaves from stems. Wash and pat dry. For herbs on woody stems, grab the top of the stem with one hand and with the other hand move down the stem opposite the direction of growth to remove leaves.

• Leaves from soft stem herbs, like basil and cilantro, can be removed with scissors or by pulling against the stem in the direction of growth.

• **Note:** Herbs may be sanitized in a mild bleach solution using 1 teaspoon household bleach per 6 cups of water. After dipping, rinse thoroughly under cold water and pat dry. *(Colorado State University Extension Service).*
How to prepare herbs for freezing in water

- Wash herbs and pat dry. Chop into small pieces either by hand or with a food processor.
- Fill ice cube tray with chopped herbs, add water to fill in the gaps and freeze. Once solid, place the frozen cubes in a storage bag and keep in the freezer.
- Label bag and the date.

Note: Some herbs when frozen change color and their texture becomes soft.

Herbs for freezing:
basil, chives, dill, lemon balm, lemongrass, mint, oregano, sage, savory, tarragon, thyme
How to preserve fresh herbs in oil or butter

• Wash herbs removing damaged leaves and stems. Spin in a salad spinner or pat dry with paper towels.
• Place herbs in a food processor with 1/3 cup of oil for every 2 cups of leaves – or ½ cup unsalted butter per 2 to 4 tablespoons of leaves. Do not add cheese or nuts at this time.
• For butters add small amounts of citrus rind, ginger or garlic for extra flavor.
• Process, occasionally scraping the sides of the bowl, until a chunky paste is achieved with all leaves.
• Package 1 cup of herb oil or ½ cup of buttered herb in a 1-quart zip top bag and press to a thin layer. Seal and freeze up to 6 months.

According to “Organic Gardening” magazine (Nov 2012), this method is preferred for preserving flavor and texture.
Drying Herbs

- Herbs dry best out of direct sunlight
- If using a dehydrator, dry herbs separately from fruits or vegetables.
- Temperatures around 95°F work well for drying herbs. Do not heat at temperatures above 110°F because herbs will burn rather than dry.
Herb drying methods

• **Microwave**: Lay the herb leaves in a single layer on a paper towel in the microwave. Cover the leaves with another paper towel. Microwave on high for 1 minute. Check herbs. If they are still soft, keep testing at 20–30 second intervals.

• **Dehydrator**: Be sure herbs are completely dry. Space leaves so they are not touching. Heat at no more than 95° until crisp enough to crumble. *(Preserve It Naturally The Complete Guide to Food Dehydration, Reston Publishing, 1983, page 65.)*

• **Oven**: Spread the herbs on a cookie sheet and dry at the lowest temperature setting possible until crisp enough to crumble.

• **Air drying**: Tie stems together using string or raffia and hang in a dry location away from light.

• **Store** in sealable plastic bag or dark glass jars. Remove air and label. Keep dried herbs stored away from heat and light.
Herbs the grow well in North Texas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About...</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basil</td>
<td>Bay Laurel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chives</td>
<td>Cilantro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epazote</td>
<td>Lavender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemon Balm</td>
<td>Lemon Verbena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marjoram</td>
<td>Mexican Mint Marigold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican Oregano</td>
<td>Mint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsley</td>
<td>Sage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemary</td>
<td>Thyme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)

Warm Season Annual

(Available types including Genovese, sweet, cinnamon, lime, spicy globe, lemon, Thai)

- Plant after danger of frost has passed.
- Start from seed or transplants
- Place in full sun in well-drained soil, add mulch to moderate soil temperature and moisture.
- Use in sauces (especially tomato) and pesto (combine in blender or food processor with garlic, olive oil, pine nuts and Parmesan cheese).
Bay Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*)

**Perennial**

- Plant may be grown as small tree or large shrub.
- Somewhat cold sensitive—protect in freezing weather.
- Can be grown in large pot.
- Leaves are used in stews, soups, and broth to enhance flavor of dish.
- Remove leaf before serving.
Chives (Onion and Garlic)—Perennial

Allium schoenoprasum (onion)
Allium tuberosum (garlic)

• Onion chive is a more desirable plant than garlic chive.
• Garlic chives are invasive and spread prolifically from seeds and are hard to eliminate in garden.
• Chopped chives can be used to flavor butter and are used in omelets and on baked potatoes.

Chinese and garlic chives have white flowers.
Cilantro (*Coriandrum sativum*)

**Cool Season Annual**

- Start from seed or purchase plant at garden center.
- Also called Chinese parsley. Seeds from the cilantro plant are the spice, coriander. Prefers cooler weather. Produces small, white flowers prior to going to seed, which may reproduce.
- Morning sun/afternoon shade. May be grown in containers.
- Leaves and stems are used in Mexican cooking for salsas, salad dressings, guacamole, casseroles and soups.
- Also used in Asian and Indian recipes.
- Fresh almost minty flavor.

“*A genetic variant near olfactory receptor genes influences cilantro preference.*” Causing some people to experience an unpleasant soapy taste. (BioMed Central, 2012)
Epazote (*Chenopodium Ambrosioides*)
Warm Season Annual

- Considered by some people to be a weed.
- Likes full sun.
- Spreads prolifically from seeds, which bloom the following year.
- Used in Mexican cooking, especially bean dishes and casseroles.
- Enhances flavor and is believed to reduce the flatulence associated with bean dishes.
Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)

Perennial

- Lovely very fragrant plant.
- Member of the mint family.
- Blooms in spring in North Texas.
- Common varieties include French, Spanish and English.
- Dried flowers can be used in various recipes including ice cream, lemonade, iced tea and cookies. Also used in sachets.
- Is included among herbs in Herbs de Provence.
- Drought tolerant. Never overwater—hates wet feet.
Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)

Perennial

- Easy to grow lemon scented member of the mint family.
- Prefers partial shade and regular watering.
- Aromatic, cosmetic, culinary, and medicinal uses.
- The dried leaves scent potpourris.
- It also is used in teas, beers, and wine and with fish, mushrooms, and soft cheeses. Fresh leaves are used in salads, marinades for vegetables, chicken salad, and poultry stuffings.
- It can be grown in containers.
**Lemon Verbena (Aloysia triphylla)**

**Tender Perennial**

- Like full sun, but tolerates some shade.
- If leaves freeze, plant may still come back from roots the following spring.
- Grows up to 3 feet tall.
- Water regularly, but do not over water.
- May bloom in late summer.
- Adds lemon flavor to teas, meats and jelly. Can be added to quick breads and cakes for a lemon accent.
Marjoram (*Origanum x marjoricum*)

Tender perennial; related to oregano

- Plant in spring in rich soil that receives afternoon shade.
- Protect with mulch in winter.
- After establishing, the plant requires only a little supplemental water during summer’s heat.
- Can be grown in containers. Harvest by cutting a stem close to the ground. Can be dried, but does not retain flavor long.
- Used in many Italian dishes with a flavor slightly milder and sweeter than oregano. Provides a wonderful complement to stews and roasted meats.
Mexican Oregano
(Lippia graveolens and Poliomintha longiflora)

• Also called oregano cimarrón, hierba dulce, and redbrush lippia.
• Not a true oregano – but has a similar flavor.
• Tender perennial.
• Prefers afternoon shade.
• Has tubular white, pink or lavender flowers.
• Drought tolerant.
• Used in chili, soups and as a seasoning for tomato-based enchilada or taco sauces.
Mexican Mint Marigold (*Tagetes lucida*) — Perennial

- Also known as Texas Tarragon.
- Has similar fragrance and flavor to French tarragon (a plant that is very difficult to grow successfully in North Texas climate).
- Easy to grow. Plant after the last frost in full sun or in a location with afternoon shade. Prefers well-drained soil. Somewhat drought tolerant, but performs better if watered weekly.
- Leaves can be used to flavor many dishes including sauces, dressings and chicken salad.
- Has yellow marigold-like blooms in the fall.
Mint—Perennial

- Very easy to grow. Many varieties of mint are available including peppermint, spearmint, apple, cinnamon, lemon, lime, chocolate and orange.
- Upright growth habit reaching 2 to 3 feet.
- Full sun to partial shade.
- Leaves die off in freezing weather and plant comes back from roots in early spring.
- Place where plant can be contained as it has a voracious spreading habit.
- Leaves can be used to flavor drinks, sauces and desserts.
- Likes water more than most herbs.
Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)

Perennial

- Easy to grow, likes afternoon shade.
- Drought tolerant but wants some supplemental water during hot, dry summer.
- Spreads horizontally and may be used as a ground cover.
- Several varieties of oregano are available in garden centers.
- Leaves can be used to flavor sauces, rubs, vegetable dishes, casseroles, herbed butter and salad dressings.
**Parsley** (*Petroselinum crispum*)

Cool Season Annual

- Slow to germinate from seed, but grows well from transplants.
- Curley and flat leaf (Italian) varieties.
- Plant in cool weather into fertile, well-drained soil with morning sun and afternoon shade. Harvest as needed by cutting stalks close to the ground.
- Parsley has a delicate favor that combines well with other herbs such as basil, chives, dill, garlic, marjoram, mint, oregano and thyme.

In Middle Eastern dishes, parsley is used fresh, while in European-style dishes, including soups and sauces, parsley is added at the end of cooking. Curly parsley is often used as a garnish.
Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

**Perennial**

- Hardy perennial; sun to partial shade. Many varieties available including purple, variegated, golden and tricolor.
- Starting sage from transplants or cuttings is easier than starting it from seed.
- Plant sage in spring or fall. Soil must be well-drained and allowed to dry out between waterings.
- Plants should be pruned severely in late winter or early spring. Harvest leaves any time after the plant is well established.
- Adds pungent flavor to beans, stuffing, sausage, poultry and roasts. Because of its strong taste, use a light hand when adding sage.
Rosemary (*Rosemary officinalis*)

**Perennial**

- Evergreen shrub. Upright and prostrate or trailing varieties are available. Upright variety is used more often for cooking. Shrubs can become 5 feet tall and 5 to 6 feet wide.
- Rosemary tolerates some shade. The upright type is more freeze tolerant than the spreading variety. Do not overwater. Harvest any time after plant is established.
- Small purple or light blue flowers in winter.
- Almost indestructible plant—OK in freezing temperatures and excessive heat, withstands drought and flood, repels insects.
- Leaves are delicious in sauces, rubs, butters and vegetable dishes. Chop leaves finely as they are a bit tough and hard to chew. Stems can be used as skewers for grilling meat and vegetables.
Thyme \textit{(Thymus var.)} 
Perennial

- Plant in spring. Can be used as ground cover or grown in a container. Many varieties available including lemon, variegated, French, German and English thyme.
- Sun to partial shade.
- Small white flowers in spring.
- Aromatic, strong flavor.
- Remove leaves from woody stem before adding to soups or sauces.

Thyme pairs well with lamb, poultry and tomato-based dishes in soups, stews, stocks and sauces. Add thyme near the end of cooking to maintain flavor.
Gardening Help Line 940-349-2892
Email us at master.gardener@dentoncounty.com
Website http://dcmga.com

Community Outreach:
Speakers’ Bureau
Ask a Master Gardener Booth

Upcoming Event:
October 5: Fall Garden Festival focusing on being water wise