



Jody Frimel from Mill Hollow Nursery shows fellow PIB Garden Club members at the group's June meeting at the PIB Yacht Club on June 9th how to make their own herb gardens in a container. Seen with Jody are (left to right) Joyce Slough, Gail McCracken, Mary Myers, Laureen Mooney, Kathy Schrader and Pam Rudolph.

HERB CONTAINER GARDENING

6/9/2021

Jody Frimel, Mill Hollow Nursery

Advantages of Container Gardening:

1. Perfect for small places
2. Pots can be moved to receive more or less sun depending on the plant
3. Can be moved to protect from frost
4. Herb containers can be placed near back door or kitchen patio for cooking convenience (out of sight, out of mind)
5. Pots can be moved and grouped when your entertaining

Selecting your container:

1. Make sure it holds enough potting soil so the roots have plenty of room
2. Choose a container with an opening that has a sufficiently wide planting area
3. Pick a container with adequate drainage holes or use "filler" in the bottom.

Container Choices:

Traditional Terracotta

Advantages

~ Beautiful, rich, earthy tone combines well with plants and weathers well so that its appearance improves with age

~ Plants grow well in terracotta- plant roots can breathe through porous walls, soaks water easily

Disadvantages

~ Dries out quickly- plants must be watered everyday

~ Rough handling can cause chipping and flaking

~ Must be stored indoors in winter

"Feather-Lite" Resin Pots

Advantages

~ Look like terracotta but are very light weight

~ No chipping or cracking

~ Has porosity like terracotta but doesn't dry out quite as fast as clay

~ Do not have to take in for winter- will not freeze and break

Disadvantages

~ Will not weather and show "aged" patina like clay

~ More expensive than clay

Plastic

Advantages

~ Lightweight

~ Less expensive than ceramic

~ Comes in a variety of colors and sizes

~ Retains moisture longer than terracotta

Disadvantage

~ Deteriorates in UV sunlight and will eventually crack

~ Is not a porous material- not as good for the plant roots

Concrete or Natural Stone

Advantages

~ Will last for years and years

~ Does not need to be taken in for the winter

~ Beautiful, natural look, adds naturalized look to garden

Disadvantages

- ~ Quite heavy and difficult to move

Glazed Ceramic Pots

Advantages

- ~ Wide range of decorative pots available- Ideal for color coordinating around house
- ~ More water retentive than clay

Disadvantages

- ~ Will chip with rough handling
- ~ Should be brought in for winter, to be on the safe side

Wood and Baskets

Advantages

- ~ Attractive, natural material in wide range of shapes and sizes
- ~ Choose a hardwood (not treated wood)

Disadvantages

- ~ Will eventually rot

Wire

Advantages

- ~ Lightweight
- ~ Unique designs, unusual shapes add focal interest
- ~ Attractive when lined with moss or coco liner

Disadvantages

- ~ If it is not vinyl coated it will eventually rust
- ~ Rough handling will break weld joints on thin wire

GETTING STARTED

- ~ Avoid using garden soil. You will avoid pests and diseases. Use a soil mix or use a "soilless" mix- this drains quickly, it is lightweight and free from soil-borne diseases and weed seeds.
- ~ Fill container with mix and wet soil. Refill, as needed, until you're about 2 inches from the top.
- ~ Arrange your plants in the container before you plant them.
- ~ Include & combine different textures, shapes, & colors of plants until they are pleasing to the eye.

CHOOSING YOUR PLANTS

- ~ Choose herbs you know you will use for cooking or herbs that you like the smell, color or texture of.
- ~ Plant herbs in separate pots that are otherwise invasive. Example; mints, lemon balm, etc.
- ~ Purchase healthy plants that are have no signs of disease or pests. Harden them off, if necessary.

KNOW YOUR PLANTS

ANNUALS- Plants that complete their cycle in one year. You will need to re-plant them the next year. There are some annuals, however, that re-seed and "act" like perennials if you do not disturb the seed.

PERENNIALS- Plants that come back from root each year. These are hardy depending on what "hardiness zone" you live in. PIB is in Zone 6B (-5 F to 0 F). Most reputable nurseries will only sell you plants that will survive in your zone. If in doubt, ask! Examples; chives, mint, oregano, some thymes, sage.

BIENNIALS- Plants that grow leaves first year, flower, re-seed and die back the second year. If you leave re-seeded area undisturbed, they will come back again and again. Examples; Hollyhock, foxglove, parsley.

TENDER PERENNIALS- Plants that are not hardy enough to survive our winters. They require "wintering" indoors. Examples; Bay Laurel, some lavenders, most rosemary's, scented geraniums.

HERBS

BASIL- ANNUAL- This herb provides us with pesto and flavor for spaghetti sauce. Sweet basil goes very well with tomatoes. If you are planning on making pesto, plan on planting at least 5 plants. **Care:** Plant in full sun or put in sunny window. Keep flowers pinched off so plants produce more leaves with better flavor. Water at base when dry. Avoid temperatures under 50 degrees and cold winds.

CHIVES – PERENNIAL- Sweet Vidalia onion-flavored leaves and lovely lavender flowers adorn chive plants. Cut chive leaves about 2 inches from the bottom. Chive plants will regenerate new leaves. Chives leaves and blossoms freeze very well. Use leaves and flowers in salads, soups, herbal butters, etc. **Care:** Plant in sun. Cut back to 1" after flowering and you'll be rewarded with a second flush of leaves.

CILANTRO – ANNUAL- Cilantro is important to the World's cuisine, but is best known as an ingredient in salsas. The leaves of cilantro are used in salads, corn, chicken, beans, and salmon. The seeds, called "coriander", are used in baking. Generally, cilantro "bolts" or goes to seed quickly. MHN grows a "cut and come again" variety. **Care:** Plant in full sun. I plant at least two plants...I harvest leaves from both but I allow one to go to seed and the other I pinch. The one that goes to seed will germinate and give you more plants in the fall.

LAVENDER –PERENNIAL- There are many varieties of lavender. Some are hardy for this zone, some are not. Hardy varieties for Zone 5 include Hidcote, Munsted, Grosso, Lavance and Provence. Pick flowers as they open and hang them upside down to dry in a dark, well ventilated place. Use flowers in cookies and cakes. Use dried flowers for a natural moth repellent or as a bath herb. **Care:** All lavenders want full sun and well-drained soil. Do not mulch over the crown. Prune back in summer or fall after flowers finish.

MINT – PERENNIAL- A strongly flavored herb with fragrant leaves and purple flowers. Generally, peppermint is used for teas, while spearmint is used in recipes that call for "mint" and in cocktails. **Care:** Mints prefer rich soil and full or part sun. Caution: Mints are invasive. Plant in a container, rather than in the ground.

OREGANO- PERENNIAL- Oregano is the only herb that is more flavorful dried rather than fresh. Cut stems back to half their length before flowers open and hang upside down in a cool, dry place. Used extensively in Italian cooking for flavoring sauces, pizza, and in German cooking for stuffing and sausages. Be careful when purchasing oregano. You want the "true Greek" variety. **Care:** Plant in full sun with well-drained soil. Replant after several years as the flavor intensity declines as the woody perennial ages.

PARSLEY – BIENNIAL- Although biennial, parsley is best grown as an annual because the leaves become bitter and tough as the plant goes to seed the second year. "Flat" leaf or Italian parsley is usually preferred for culinary uses, however, many people use the "curled" variety, equally. Cut leaves with scissors and use fresh or freeze in Zip-Lock bag for winter use. **Care:** Plant in full sun or light shade in deep, moist and well-drained soil.

ROSEMARY –TENDER PERENNIAL- Rosemary is for remembrance and is a thoughtful gift to someone who has lost a loved one. As a tender perennial, sometimes it survives our winter but if you're not willing to take a chance, bring it indoors in the winter in a very cool room with sunlight and good ventilation. Rosemary likes full sun or part shade and light well-drained soil.

Use with lamb, pork, beef, and poultry dishes, oven-baked steak fries, mashed potatoes, jellies and jams and anything grilled. Use a sprig of rosemary as a brush for basting. **Care:** Water when dry. Be careful not to overwater or let dry out for a prolonged period.

SAGE – PERENNIAL- Sage is a hardy perennial that is known as the “youth herb”. Use it in the bath to soothe sore muscles or drink as a tea to calm nerves. It is most well known for its use in poultry stuffing. The common culinary variety has beautiful blue flowers blooming in the late spring and early summer. **Care:** Plant in full sun or light shade where soil is well-drained. In early spring cut plants back to keep them bushy. Harvest leaves before plant blooms and again in late summer for fresh use. Cut stems and hang to dry in a cool place (or take the lazy approach like I do, and let them dry right on the plant and harvest all winter long right off the plant.)

Replant every 2-3 years as plants become woody.

THYME –PERENNIAL- Attractive low-growing and creeping plants with stems of small to tiny leaves. Aromatic leaves are used for culinary, ornamental, and medicinal purposes. Pick the leaves of culinary thymes and use for soups, sauces, salads, meat and vegetable dishes. Thymes are perennials except in the harshest of winters when they might not make it or have some “winter kill”. **Care:** Thyme prefers full sun and well-drained soil. Each spring prune back to encourage compactness. Pick leaves anytime.

PLANT MAINTENANCE

- ~ Water container after planting and when soil feels dry to the touch.
 - ~ Label your plants. Keep the tag next to the plant for reference. For example, it's easy to confuse cilantro with Italian parsley.
 - ~ Place herb container in sun or part sun.
 - ~ Watch for pests and diseases. At first sign of bugs use insecticidal soap or a Rotonone/Pyrethum mix. If you see a white powder forming on leaves and stems (Powdery Mildew) make a mix of:
 - 2 T. Ultra Fine Sunspray (Lowes has it)
 - 2 T. Baking Soda
 - 1 Gal. Water
- Spray once a week for 3-4 weeks.

HARVESTING, USING & PRESERVING HERBS

- ~ Use and enjoy herbs throughout the season. If you buy a potted herb you can begin harvesting soon after planting.
- ~ Ideally herbs should be harvested in early morning after the dew dries but before the sun becomes intense.
- ~ Cut stems instead of pulling leaves off. This will promote plant growth. Pick off flowers unless your using seed like with dill or coriander (cilantro). Herbs are at peak flavor before flowers open.
- ~ Use the herbs "fresh" as much as possible. When using a recipe that calls for dried herbs use this ratio: 1 tea. dried = 1 T. fresh
- ~ When cooking, add herbs about 30 min. before end of cooking time. The herbs will have a more intense flavor. Try new herbs.
- ~ To dry herbs, tie freshly picked herbs in small bunches and hang upside down in a dark, airy place. After 2 weeks strip leaves off stalks & store in glass jar. For freezing, rinse herbs, pat dry and place in zip-lock plastic bag. Thick, leafy herbs like basil, parsley, and chives should be frozen.