



## Grow your own herbs

In the Maltese islands, it is the practice to get free celery and parsley with your fruit and vegetables shopping. However, other herbs have to be purchased. Most of the time, only a small amount of such herbs is used. This leads to the eventual throwing away of herbs which have withered away. This is a waste. (you can dry or freeze herbs) Having your own little herb garden can help you save a lot. Here are some tips on how to set up your own herb garden.

### Pick some pots

One advantage of a home-grown herb garden is that it is always available when needed. Need to add flavour to that pasta or chicken roast? Just grab a few leaves of basil, mint, sage or a sprig of thyme from your herb garden and use.

Pots can easily be placed in various places like on your kitchen counter, in your balcony, yard, roof or on any windowsill. The material of your container can vary. Clay, wood, resin and metal are all options. You can also reuse empty milk cartons or plastic bottles. It is important to provide enough drainage. Any pot or planter you use must let excess water escape, which is why most planting containers have holes in them. You do not need a large pot for herbs, otherwise it will take longer to grow. On the other hand a cramped planter will cause your herbs to become root-bound. That will hamper their nutrition, stress them or even kill them.

### Choosing your herbs

If this is the first time you've tried growing herbs, start simple. Parsley, mint and basil are good options for pot-growing. They all tend to grow prolifically and do not mind frequent harvesting. Here are some examples of staple herb varieties and their characteristics:

## THIS CAN BE DONE IN A TABLE FORMAT

### Basil

Relatively easy to grow, basil prefers sunny locations. It also does best in rich soil that is well-watered.

### Mint

With an aggressive growth rate, mint is best in its own container and above ground. It can handle shade, but it is better suited to strong sunlight.

### Oregano

This herb has small and flavourful leaves. It requires full sunshine and lots of drainage. Oregano is also a tender perennial that you will have to bring inside during winter months.

### Parsley

Parsley does best in moist, well-drained soil and can grow in partially shaded areas.

### Thyme

This herb has heavily scented leaves and prefers less water. You do need to give thyme exposure to full sunlight and well-drained soil.

### Rosemary

The resinous leaves of rosemary are highly aromatic. The herb requires cool climates with plenty of sun and moist (not wet) soil. It is also best to bring rosemary indoors for the winter.

### Forget seeds, use starter plants

Unless you are an experienced gardener, use starter plants for your herbs. This will save you two to three weeks of grow time and increase your chances of a successful harvest.

### Get the right soil

When it is time to plant, use potting soil – not garden soil. Potting soil drains water more effectively. The former is lighter and porous, while the latter is dense and traps (or blocks) moisture inside containers.

### Care and harvesting

Do not forget to water your herbs regularly. It takes constant, regular care for herbs to flourish. That means you must water them on a consistent schedule. You will need to harvest them often, too, since this primes them for new growth. Just be sure to match any treatment of your herbs to their specific variety.

You can also have as many new shootings as you like to replant. This is done by taking off the majority of the leaves, especially the bigger ones, and putting the shoots in jars filled with water. These will easily produce new roots making it easy to replant new ones. This works most for basil