



5518 Liberty Grove Rd.
Rowlett, TX 75089
(972) 475-5888
www.covingtonnursery.com

Creating an Herb Garden

Soil Preparation - Before planting your herbs, we recommend carefully accessing and preparing the soil so that it has proper drainage. In North Texas, our heavy, sticky clay soil needs to be amended before you plant a new bed. Plant roots don't get enough oxygen in clay soils. Raised beds, compost and other amendments help. Back to Earth composted cotton burrs and expanded shale are two of the best soil amendments which can be added to our Texas gumbo to ensure success in your raised beds and mixed borders. Expanded shale, a gravel-size rock that is pumped full of air, aerates clay soil, makes it easy to work and helps it drain better. You only need to add it to the soil once and work it into the beds at root level.

- Till in 3 inches of expanded shale, 6 to 8 inches deep into existing weed free soil.
- Till in 2-3 inches of composted cotton burrs.
- Mix the expanded shale, compost and soil thoroughly.

Top dress the bed with landscape mix.

Covington's Soil Builder is a combination of expanded shale, composted cotton burrs and Texas greensand which can be used as a one-step application to save time and labor.

A **raised bed garden** is a garden built on top of your native soil, sometimes incorporating native soil, sometimes not. Raised bed gardens can be contained, such as when you build a wood or stone structure to keep the bed intact, or they can be more free form, with soil and amendments merely piled several inches high.

You can plant anything from herbs and vegetables to perennials and shrubs in a raised bed. The soil in a raised bed will warm sooner in the spring and raised beds allow gardening in poor soil areas, production is improved, and you gain accessibility, due to the higher than ground level plants and herbs.

By properly preparing the planting area, the roots of your new plants will adjust and begin to grow more rapidly and deeply. **Mulching is a must.** Mulches save you time and money because they keep moisture in, but protect plants from heavy rainfall or extreme temperatures. They also keep weeds away. Good choices are hardwood, cedar or cypress mulch.

Many herbs prefer moderate to dry conditions and require good drainage in both containers and raised beds. It is easy to correct poor drainage with expanded shale. It is important to always '*deep water*' your plants rather than a light sprinkling, especially during the hot summer months. Encourage deeper root growth by soaking the soil, and then letting it become dry an inch or two down before you water again. When growing herbs in containers, it is a good idea to combine several herbs together with the same watering requirements. Basil and cilantro are examples of herbs which prefer moist soil, and are not cold hardy, so I suggest planting them in their own container or with other varieties within the same herb family so you can bring these containers indoors in the event of a late freeze.

Most herbs prefer full sun, for those that do, 6 hours per day is ideal. In North Texas you might consider planting those herbs that tolerate part shade, in morning sun and afternoon shade conditions. Mints, chamomile, bee balm, catnip, basil, chives and lavender are examples of some herbs which would benefit from some shade in the afternoon (mints will thrive in a mostly shady condition but are also tolerant of full sun)

Herb Gardening in Containers – Herbs can be grown very successfully in containers and are a practical solution for people who have limited gardening space at their disposal. You can easily move the containers towards a warmer area if needed and back into the shade if the season gets too hot. Container herbs are more readily available for use when they are grouped together and you will be more likely to use them when they are right outside your kitchen door. Finding the right container is a matter of personal taste, as almost any container can be used for planting herbs as long as adequate drainage holes are present. Herbs can be planted on their own or in combination with other herbs. When planting more than one variety in a container, care should be taken that there will be ample growing space for all the plants. Prune the faster growing varieties regularly to ensure they do not overgrow their slower companions.



5518 Liberty Grove Rd.
Rowlett, TX 75089
(972) 475-5888
www.covingtonnursery.com

Fertilizing Herbs - Fertilize with a natural product like compost tea or Sea Mist Super Seaweed Plus twice a month during the plants active growing period and/or a balanced timed released fertilizer such as Osmocote when preparing the soil for planting. In general, herbs require only a limited amount of fertilizer. Too much fertilizer encourages leafy growth at the expense of the volatile oil, which gives the herb plant its flavor.

Most herbs are herbaceous (non-woody) in character. Some herbs, such as lavender, rosemary, hyssop, some sages and basil may become semi-shrubs with woody stems, especially in temperate zones. These herbs are better suited for raised beds and large containers.

Annuals, Perennials and Biennials - Like other plants, herbs classified as annuals have but one season of growth, though some of them reseed. Biennials have two seasons of growth, producing leaves the first year and then flowering and setting seed the second year. Perennials have ongoing growth, some of them lasting several seasons, others many years.

Perennials may die back completely to the ground in winter and re-emerge from the crown (with the exception of those herbs which are evergreen). Don't be hasty to remove perennials, as some are slow to show new growth in the spring.

Soil mix for container grown herbs

2/3 Covington's Potting Soil
1/3 Expanded Shale

Italian Chef *Sweet Basil *Italian Parsley *Oregano
*Marjoram *Thyme *Trailing Rosemary

French Chef *Tarragon *Chives *Sage *Trailing
Rosemary *Curly Parsley

Tea Pot *Bee Balm (dwarf) *German Chamomile
*Lemon Balm *Peppermint *Stevia (**medium
container**)

Perfume Pot *Lavender *Lemon Scented Geranium
(Citronella) *Pineapple Sage *Lemon Balm (**large
container**)

Additional Tips for Success with Herbs

Harvest regularly. This promotes stem and leaf growth, keeps flowers from forming and keeps the herb producing for a longer period of time. Your herb plants will look better and be healthier if pruned back regularly.

Do not allow your herbs to flower early in the growing season. Once a plant flowers, this is the signal that its life cycle is about to end. Your herb is making a flower, then a seed, and then it dies back for that season. It is best to keep any flowers from forming in the first place. As you see a flower budding, simply pinch the flower/bud off.

Do not spray chemicals onto herb plants. There are many ways to keep ahead of the problems that may otherwise need chemical applications. Weed regularly, watch your herbs closely for insect attack, and fertilize with a natural product like Nature's Guide Fish & Seaweed or Liquid Seaweed, Fox Farm's Peace of Mind 3-4-3 Plant Starter, or Ferti-lome Fish Emulsion fertilizer. Herbs are often rinsed and used fresh and should never be exposed to any treatment that could be potentially dangerous or toxic to those eating them.

Herbs in the mint family tend to be very vigorous, and some varieties invasive, when planted in the garden, so it is better to plant mints in containers.

If you plan to harvest the leaves of certain varieties of herb plants quite often for cooking, etc., you may want to plant at least 3 of each plant to ensure a steady supply (exception: most mint varieties and well established chives).

Most herbs require good drainage but success in the cultivation of Lavender, Rosemary, Sage, and Thyme is dependent upon it.

Creeping Thyme, Corsican Mint and Chamomile are excellent between stepping-stones and in rock gardens.

Herbs are beneficial plants for your garden -

Beyond their many obvious uses, herbs have a little known utility in your garden as well. Chives, a member of the onion family, are a natural pesticide! Its scent scares bugs away from your roses and flowers...plant it in your flower garden for beauty and utility. Some herbs like dill, fennel and parsley attract some of the more beneficial insects to your garden. Their low-lying flowers make good homes for the insects that will help your garden to thrive. Many herbs are attractive to butterflies and bees, and are worth planting in your garden to encourage the fertilization that comes along with these helpful insects. Bees and butterflies especially love anise hyssop, thyme and sage. Plant these in your flower garden!