

The Herb Garden

My little herb garden along the stonewall
The **thyme** and **rosemary** beginning to crawl
Onto the path that lies under my feet
In and out of the crevices, ever so sweet.

The waft of the **mint** is pleasing to me
Summoning me to get down on my knee
To break off a sprig and give it a bite
Refreshing my breath to my every delight.

The **dill** and the **parsley** are at such a height
The **chives** are aching to reach up to the light
Their purple crowns swaying to and fro in the wind
Softly teasing the kitten, under his chin.

This month continues the theme “Herbs in Poetry.” May’s choice is the first part of a charming reminiscence by Timothy Steele. May herbs are **chives**, **dill**, **mint**, **parsley**, **rosemary** and **thyme**.

Thyme's many fragrances and flavors have a cornucopia of applications from spicing up cheeses and soups, to adding that unexpected bite to your potpourri (store bought or homemade).

Thyme tea will treat a hangover and help you digest that big meal. It will also help sooth a sore throat or persistent cough. It is an essential ingredient in the herb blend bouquet garni and is a natural in sauces that use tomatoes or red wine as a base.

Thyme is also a delicious flavoring for game, poultry, beef, egg dishes and shellfish. It has a strong flavor, so use restraint when learning to use it in your cooking.

French and English people created a bed of thyme to attract fairies and make them feel at home in the garden.

*"I know a bank where the wild **Thyme** blows,"
... Oberon - The Fairy King, A Midsummer Night's Dream
(the bed of thyme in which Titania, the fairy queen, sleeps)*

Rosemary can be difficult to use if you don't know the tricks. The dried leaves are tough and can be a nightmare in delicate dishes like soups unless it has been minced fine to distribute the flavor and soften the skin. When used fresh, it's always best to retain the whole sprig, removing it before serving your prepared dish. As a marinade ingredient, the leaves can be brushed from the meat before cooking.



Enjoy ground rosemary on roasted potatoes, whole sprigs as a seasoning for minestrone and beef stew, and in a marinade for leg of lamb. It also makes a great garnish, an attractive base for an herb wreath, and an impressive and aromatic houseplant.

Rosemary tea is great for headaches. Try steeping a sprig of fresh or a tablespoon of dry rosemary in a cup of boiling water for fifteen minutes. Strain and drink. I always sweeten the tea with honey.

*"Where **Rosemary** flourished, the woman ruled."*

-
Traditional Saying

Mint makes a tea that's great for stomach upsets. It is a welcome ingredient in desserts and as a garnish. It can be added to bath water as a pick-me-up before an evening out, and is also one of the primary ingredients in the famous mint julep and mint jelly recipes. For a refreshing change, mint can be delicious with vegetables like peas and carrots, or included in a fruit salad.

There are lots of mint varieties to choose from too, like: apple mint, peppermint, spearmint, Winter green, chocolate mint and others.

*"As for the garden of **Mint**, the very smell of it alone recovers and refreshes our spirits,*

as the taste stirs up our appetite for meat."

-
Pliny the Elder

Dill has long been used in German and Scandinavian cooking and is now a favorite herb in America. It has a distinctive sour flavor that makes an interesting and sometimes unexpected statement in cooking. The leaves, seeds, and flowers of the plant can all be used with the possible exception of the stem. Depending on the part you are using, there is a big difference in the intensity of the flavor.

The leaves are least flavorful, so use them in the highest concentrations in egg dishes, with fish, cheese spreads and on vegetables. Cucumbers marinated in Dill and vinegar or mixed with sour cream with dill are a delicious accompaniment to a summer meal. If you feel that your navy bean soup lacks punch, try adding a pinch of dried dill to spice up the flavor.

The flowering tops of dill have more flavor than the seeds and make a good addition to the pickle jar. Instead of just pickling gherkins this year, try a colorful vegetable medley.

Dill seeds provide the strongest flavor by far. Used whole or ground, they are a good accompaniment to soups, fish, and vegetables. They can also be used to make a unique herb bread, flavored vinegar, and can even be added in small quantities to desserts, particularly those containing apples.

*... an early April morning I worked in the dirt
shoveled compost cursed flies
organic clumps on my heavy boots ...
Later, I shaped mounds to protect tender roots
planted tiny **Dill** seeds and the rains came
planted dill and they came again
planted dill that flourished ...
... Jacquelyn Markham*

Parsley may be the most easily identified of all of the herbs. It is a common resident of the bins and shelves of produce departments around the world, and is the most beloved garnish available for the table. In the garden, there are two common varieties: curly and flat leaf (Italian) parsley.

Curled or curly leafed parsley varieties are considered less flavorful and more decorative than their Italian relative. They both have a place in the kitchen, one as a garnish, and the other as a flavoring for soups, stews, salads, sauces, egg and potato dishes, stuffing, and vegetable medleys.

Parsley is a great "medley" herb. It plays well with others to create a dish with a nice blending of flavors. It is one of the key ingredients it is a key ingredient in bouquet garni and is a familiar herb in any number of salad and egg dishes, stuffing, and soups. When using parsley, add it toward the end of the cooking cycle unless you are planning on discarding it (as with bouquet garni).

*“An honest laborious Country-man, with good Bread, Salt and a little **Parsley**,
will make a contented Meal with a roasted Onion.”
John Evelyn*

Chives are a member of the onion family and impart a mild onion flavor when sprinkled fresh on meats and vegetables. Think of chives as a staple herb; it doesn't retain much flavor when dried (dried chives are usually only flavorful for about a month), so always have some fresh on hand. Use chives regularly as a seasoning and garnish on almost all of your vegetables. It makes a good stand in for green onion, adding some into mashed potatoes and as a finishing touch for my cream soups and sauces. Try mixing chives with cream cheese slathered on a bagel. An old favorite is scrambled eggs with chopped chives cooked in butter

*Walk with me along Chives pathway
...my little chive path...small but beautiful!
I know deep beneath the snow..these beautiful Pearls are coming to life..
and soon in the Spring..they will awaken and greet me...
...Victoria Patella*

If poetry does not stimulate you to produce a herbal culinary delight, perhaps hunger will drive you to produce a special meal for our dinner next week. Surprise us all with your choice.

Finally, here is the Question-of-the-Month:

In what television show was the magic word, "**Herbidacious**" spoken, which caused the garden gate in a walled fantasy garden to open.

Herbidacious yours,
The Culinary Committee