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Reaping the benefits of planting a herb garden

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Growing your own food is, without question, a commitment. Yet, there is something wonderful about pulling your first potato from the soil and knowing exactly where it came from. This guide is aimed at complete



beginners who are willing to give growing their own food a go, but don't know quite where to start. Here, we'll go through the top five herbs people who don't have very big gardens, or only have balcony space, to grow.

Fertilising your plants

If you are the same as me in that you don't have enough garden space to buy a composter for your kitchen scraps, here's a brilliant way to ensure that you're putting them to good use. Buy a small organic foods waste bin to start with. Once this is full, or at least once a week, empty your peels, coffee filters and egg shells into a good food processor.

Before turning it on, make sure you add at least 250ml of water. Turn on the food processor for quick bursts at first, so that your processor doesn't get too overworked. Once the kitchen scraps have been emulsified into a liquid, you've made perfect plant fertiliser in five minutes. Place the fertiliser on the soil, and mix in slightly with a trowel, making sure to avoid the roots. Immediately after you've done this, wash your food processor thoroughly and store until the next time you need it.

Herbs

These are especially great plants for beginners. You can't beat putting freshly cut herbs in recipes, plus the supermarket prices of small cuttings are well worth avoiding.

Rosemary

This Mediterranean plant is used in many recipes. To grow it in a pot, make sure you start with a cutting of the plant itself, as seedlings can be a bit trickier to grow. As it has a deep root system, ensure that your pot is large enough and deep enough, and that you don't overcrowd the pot with other plants. This herb needs full sun, being Mediterranean in origin, and not much water at all. I'd recommend watering once the soil is dry up to your index finger's knuckle. The optimum planting time for rosemary is in April, but the plant is pretty

hardy so planting in autumn is fine too, just be prepared that it will take a bit longer to grow. If there is frost at the coldest parts of the year, take it inside until the spring. You should also keep it out of windy conditions as much as possible. Once spring has arrived, make sure to put outside to attract rare honeybees.

Mint

Mint is very easy to grow, and is great in teas, cocktails and various salads and pasta dishes; plus it attracts



rare honeybees too. The one thing to remember about mint is that it can be prolific, so make sure to plant in a separate container if you don't wish to suddenly find that your whole herb garden is now a mint-only zone. Another thing to be aware of is that, unlike rosemary, it thoroughly enjoys moist conditions, so make sure to water it regularly. Position your mint out of direct sunlight, as this could cause the leaves to wilt and the plant to die. You could do this by planting it behind a plant – like rosemary – which enjoys lapping up the rays, or by placing it in an area of your garden or on your balcony where there is no direct sunshine. Avoid placing it outside when there is ground frost around, take inside when this happens, but it enjoys being outside for the majority of the year – from March to November.

Thyme

Thyme, another honeybee favourite, is also a herb which enjoys direct sunlight, so ensure that you've got it in an optimum, sunny spot. Much like rosemary, it doesn't need to be overwatered. There are many differing variants, with the most common being French Thyme. Enjoy in salads, pasta dishes and in soups or stews.

Basil

Basil is more of a summer plant, so if you're planning on planting outside, the best time would be at the beginning of May. However, if like me you're impatient to get some great, fresh basil to go with your mozzarella, you can keep the plant indoors until summer comes around again. It does enjoy lots of direct sunlight, so I'd recommend placing it in a part of the room which gets some sunlight, but isn't blasted in rays the entire day through.

The thing to remember with indoor basil is that you need to fertilise it a lot more than if it were outside; the above tip for providing automatic fertiliser from your kitchen scraps resolves this problem. Do make sure to mix with the soil well, because you don't want the fertiliser to make your room smelly. Basil enjoys a lot of water, so make sure to water regularly, but also ensure that the pot has good drainage holes.

Coriander

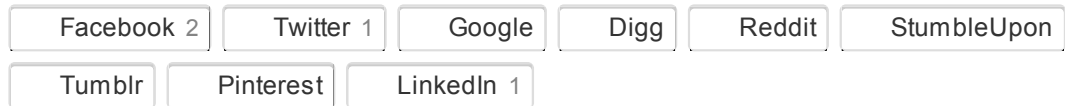
Coriander is absolutely delicious in salads and all kinds of fragrant curries. You should grow this from the seed, as it does not take to transplanting. I'd recommend that the seedling be kept indoors, unless it is planted in the summer time, to ensure the warmth which it usually thrives in. Water and fertilise regularly, though



ensure that the soil is not soggy, but damp and that there is good drainage in the plant pot.

Coriander is slightly more delicate than the other plants mentioned above, but it is more than worth the time growing. It should be put in a window which has early-morning sunlight, as it does not tolerate direct and intense midday heat. Moreover, ensure to fertilise regularly.

You should regularly prune all above plants to encourage continued growth. All fledgling herbs should be taken inside when there is frost outside, which is under 3 degrees Celsius.



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