

EVERGREEN HERBS

Backyard vegetable gardens continue to be extremely popular; don't forget that you can grow your own herbs too. Most common culinary herbs can be easily grown in the Pacific Northwest, and many are perennial plants, meaning you won't have to replant them every year.

Better yet, did you know that many common herbs are actually cold hardy, evergreen shrubs or subshrubs that retain their foliage all winter and remain year after year. Here are a few of the tough evergreen herbs you can grow not only in your garden but even integrate into your landscape.

Most varieties of **Rosemary** grow very well in the Pacific Northwest. The best Rosemary for coastal and foothills areas is simply basic rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*). The variety 'ARP' is a large-growing and a reliably cold-hardy cultivar of Rosemary. Creeping Rosemary cultivars (e.g. 'Huntington Carpet') are not reliably cold-hardy in the coldest parts of the Pacific Northwest.

Right away, you might say, "But my Rosemary died this past winter." True. Once every once in a while, rosemary plants die during an usually cold winter. Often, it's mild autumn weather followed by a quick, hard frosts that cause Rosemary to perish.

Many cultivars of the common **Garden Sage** (*Salvia officinalis*) deviate from the usual aromatic, silver-green textured foliage, but all are nonetheless equally as culinary. Golden Sage ('Icterina') has brightly gold variegated leaves; Purple Sage has rich, purplish-green leaves; Tricolor Sage has bright variegated green and white leaves with red/burgundy stems. The variety 'Berggarten' has larger, more rounded thick, gray leaves as well as a higher essential oil content.

Lavender is an excellent landscaping plant for Pacific Northwest gardens. The silver foliage provides for contrast, and the flowers bloom for a long time in summer. English Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) and its many varieties are compact and the most reliably cold-hardy lavender for climates with regular frosts and snow. The long stem Lavenders (*Lavandula x intermedia*; also called "Lavandins" or Intermediate Lavenders), typically used for oil production and for cooking, are also suitable for foothills gardens, though not as reliably cold hardy. Spanish Lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*) cultivars (e.g. 'Otto Quast', 'Papillion') are "tender" and not reliably cold-hardy in the coldest parts of the Pacific Northwest.

One can also enjoy the many types of **Thyme**, which can be considered to be of two types, upright and creeping. The creeping nature of thymes like Caraway Thyme and Lime Thyme make them more difficult to harvest. They are best utilized in sunny locations along pathways or between pavers and stepping stones.

The best culinary thymes have an upright growth habit to 12" tall. The two most common cultivars are English Thyme (with a more "herby" flavor), and French Thyme

(with a more “floral” component). One of my favorites is Orange Balsam thyme: it’s spicy and fruity! Variegated lemon thyme is very showy with bright gold variegated leaves, while Silver Thyme and its cousin Silver Posie have silver and white variegation, respectively. Thymes are quite drought tolerant and work well as single plantings, small hedges or in rock gardens.

Winter Savory is an under-utilized herb/shrub in the garden and landscape. As a sprawling, low-growing evergreen shrub, Winter Savory (*Satureja montana*) has tiny needle like leaves that when crushed remind me of a tangy thyme fragrance: great for salad dressings. During the driest part of the summer, this tough and drought tolerant shrub is very showy, covered in little white flowers! Winter Savory should not to be confused with Summer Savory (*Satureja hortensis*) which is an annual.

Cultivation Tips

Provide all of these herbs with as much sun as possible. Avoid situations with standing water during winter. When planting amend soils with compost to improve drainage.

Culinary herbs can be easily integrated into your landscape. If you decide plant perennial herbs in your vegetable garden, think carefully about the placement before just planting them anywhere. Almost all vegetable crops are short-lived plants that are replaced during the year. Perennial herbs (which persist year after year), *can get in the way of planning your vegetable garden* when planted without forethought in random locations.

Continued Care

Now this is very important! All small-leaved, evergreen plants/shrubs (not just the herbs mentioned here, but also, for example, winter heather, germander, rockcress, candytuft) should be pruned annually *after blooming* to remove spent flower spikes. Failure to do so will result in the all too familiar bare-center, flopped-over look that we gardeners tend to find unappealing. Again, prune off spent flower spikes and shear to shape *after blooming each year* to maintain a tight and tidy mounded shape. Use those flower clippings too!