

The Herb Garden

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Authored by Garreta Kipp

Some gardens may beguile us with beautiful blooms, some may lure us with delightful wafts of fragrance and some may invite us to linger by virtue of their calming patterned design. Our herb garden definitely does all three – and more! Herbs have long been cherished for their culinary and health value – they provide an array of textures, colors, aromas and flavors that bring both nutrition and tasty interest to the foods we so lovingly prepare. Many herbs have leaves and/or flowers that can be made into refreshing teas, and many have been long recognized for their therapeutic value.

If you are looking for ideas to create or enhance your own herb garden, a visit to our Fort Bend County Master Gardeners' Herb Garden would be well worth your time! Our garden is thoughtfully laid out in a modified classic knot design that makes it easy to stroll amongst the plants and to see and appreciate the specialness of each first-hand! Myrtle trees canopy portions of the garden, providing cover for shade-loving plants – and for visitors as they meander the garden paths or take time to rest on a well-placed garden bench!

Among the herbs you will find in our garden are those suited to our local hot and humid summer climate. These include familiar culinary favorites such as Rosemary - prized by cooks for its unique earthy flavor and aromatic fragrance, Lemon Balm – noted for its fresh scent and taste, and Thyme – another aromatic herb and one whose uses are notably versatile. Each of these common herbs is rather easy to grow and would be a well-chosen addition to your home garden.

Are you fond of beautiful flowers? These can be found in our herb garden, too! The bright red edible flowers of Turk's Cap add cheer to any garden and can be made into a delightful tea. The gorgeous, clustered purple blooms of the heat-tolerant Cardinal Basil would be a dramatic addition to any floral arrangement! Also of special note is the leaf of this hardy plant, which has the hallmark flavor of basil with an underlying hint of licorice. Given the versatility of basil as a culinary herb, Cardinal Basil may be a plant you want to include in your garden, too.

If fragrance is your focus, the leaves of Rose Scented Geraniums and the flowers of Poet's Jasmine will delight your senses. As an added bonus, the Geranium leaves and the Jasmine flowers both can be used to brew delicious teas.

Perhaps you have an interest in more unusual herbs, in which case our garden will not disappoint you! Are you familiar with Culantro? The bright green leaves of this plant have a taste similar to Cilantro, its botanical cousin, but Culantro is more heat tolerant than Cilantro – something important to consider in our hot summer season. Another interesting plant is Turmeric, a tuber-producing plant that is becoming more popular with home gardeners, both for its culinary use as an herb (often used in curries) and for its reputed health benefits.

Two books that you might consider to assist with information on herb selection, growing techniques and chemical-free maintenance are *Herbs for Texas* by Howard Garrett, and *Southern Herb Growing* by

Madalene Hill, founder of the Hilltop Herb Farm. Madalene Hill's book includes many tempting recipes featuring herbs, of course!

With so many potential herbs to cultivate, it can be a challenge to select those with which to start. Our user-friendly and well-organized Fort Bend County Master Gardener website, www.fbmga.org, provides photos and names (common and scientific) of the plants used in each of our demonstration gardens. We especially invite you to visit our Herb Garden to experience first-hand its relaxing ambiance, variety of plantings and fragrance. When you do, look for a small onsite kiosk to find a take-home list of the herbs we are successfully growing. We invite you to grow them, too!