



Our Favorite Container Herbs

Lemon thyme

Name: *Thymus × citriodorus* and cvs.

USDA Hardiness Zones: 6 to 9

Size: 6 to 12 inches tall and 10 to 24 inches wide

Conditions: Full sun; average, well-drained soil

Description

Known for its intense lemon aroma, lemon thyme in the ground grows as a spreading mat. In a container, it forms an attractive, upright mound of small, pointed, glossy green leaves. As the branches grow, they spread out and trail over the container's edge. By early summer, they produce dense heads of lilac flowers that last well over a month.

How to grow lemon thyme

Lemon thyme is best grown from plants, not seeds, and should overwinter outdoors. The following spring, prune back to new growth. Plants eventually form hardened mats, which need to be divided or discarded. Trim plants over the growing season by cutting back stems. Lemon thyme will flower nicely if you let it, but cut back stems and fertilize afterward.

Uses

Lemon thyme is most known for flavoring savory dishes, especially fish and stuffing's for poultry and vegetables. It can also be used to make an herbal tea that is thought to help with respiratory problems, including asthma, in children. Dried leaves of lemon thyme can be added to herb pillows, potpourris, or sachets to freshen cupboards. As an essential oil, lemon thyme can be used in aromatherapy to combat asthma and other respiratory complaints in children.

'Alaska' Nasturtium

Name: *Tropaeolum majus* 'Alaska'

Zones: Annual

Size: 8 to 12 inches tall and 12 to 18 inches wide

Conditions: Full sun; lean, moist, well-drained soil

Description

Nasturtium has succulent stems that can grow in either an upright or trailing form. Cream and green variegated foliage is attractive even out of bloom, but sports bright, spurred flowers in red, yellow, or orange in summer. Alaska Nasturtium has a spicy, warm flavor that floats in the air.

How to grow nasturtium

In late spring, when temperatures warm, sow seeds outdoors directly in containers in two batches about a week apart. Two sowings will ensure a longer season of bloom. Don't fertilize, but add a couple of handfuls of perlite to the growing medium to reduce nutrients so that plants produce more flowers than leaves. In late summer, aphids can be a problem. Cut the plants back and spray with a pyrethrum-based organic insecticide.

Uses

All parts of Alaska Nasturtium are edible and have a peppery taste. The flowers make an attractive addition to salads, or as decoration on cakes. Nasturtium are also host plants for aphids. Simply plant near roses or aphid-invested plants, and the aphids will move onto the nasturtium. Since the nasturtium are an annual, you can just compost the plants at the end of the season.

Lemon Balm

Name: *Melissa officinalis* and cvs.

Zones: 4 to 9

Size: 2 feet tall and 12 to 18 inches wide

Conditions: Full sun; average, well-drained soil

Description

Lemon balm is an easygoing, lemon-scented herb with heartshaped, light green leaves. In the same family as mint, lemon balm is a fast grower and will quickly overtake its allotted space in a garden; making it a good candidate for container gardening. Tastes like lemon plus mint.

How to grow lemon balm

Sow seeds indoors six weeks before the last frost, lightly covering them with soil. Plant out seedlings in late spring. Cut back plants throughout the growing season to keep them bushy with fresh foliage. By the end of the season, lemon balm will have developed woody stems and can overwinter in pots. It is a short-lived perennial, however, so start new plants in spring by dividing the original plant, discarding woody growth, and repotting in fresh soil.

Uses

Lemon balm has many uses. It is often used in herbal teas, and as such is considered a sedative. It is also very versatile in cooking and used in many recipes, because of its delicate lemony flavor. Lemon balm is believed to help indigestion, insomnia, colds, flu, low blood pressure, and many others. This website, Epicentre.com, has a number of more uses, as well as recipes.

'Genovese' and 'Purple Ruffles' Basils

Name: *Ocimum basilicum* 'Genovese' and 'Purple Ruffles'

Zones: Annual

Size: 2 feet tall and 12 to 15 inches wide

Conditions: Full sun; fertile, well-drained soil

Description

Basil is queen of the herb garden. Its lustrous, sweet-and-spicy leaves come in green or purple and smooth or ruffled, and they always draw attention. 'Genovese' basil has a superior sweet-clove flavor. Pair 'Genovese' with 'Purple ruffles' basil to achieve a flavorful display of eye-catching contrast. 'Purple Ruffles' is a popular cultivar with both purple foliage and ruffled edges to the leaves. The flowers are terminal, spike-like racemes that are usually purple or white.

How to grow basil

Basil is easy to grow and can be started directly in its permanent container. Sow seeds indoors four to six weeks before the last frost. Keep plants indoors until temperatures reach between 60°F and 70°F. In hot weather, basil will take off and want to flower, leading to sparse foliage. Remove flower spikes throughout the season to promote increased growth and branching. You can also keep plants bushy and encourage fresh leaf production by cutting back stems.

Uses

Basil is most known for its use in recipes, especially Italian food, pesto, and one of my all-time favorites, [Caprese Salad](#). Basil can also be used in teas to aid digestion. It is believed to help aid fatigue. Basil also makes an excellent addition to infused olive oil.

Variegated Pineapple Mint

Name: *Mentha suaveolens* 'Variegata'

Zones: 6 to 9

Size: 1 foot tall and 3 feet wide

Conditions: Full sun; fertile, moist soil

Description

Pineapple mint has no discernible pineapple flavor but is a beautiful, spreading foliage plant with ruffled, cream-splashed green leaves that taste sweet and fruity. In the garden, it takes over damp corners, but in a container, it produces just enough leaves to fill out a medium-size pot.

How to grow pineapple mint

Pineapple mint is best grown from plants, not seeds, but it can easily be propagated using cuttings. To ensure a fresh supply of plants the following season, replant a few rooted clumps in a cold frame.

Uses

In recipes, can be used in fruit salads and salads, and to season vegetables. Makes a yummy tea. Great in pot pourri. Also makes a good garnish, as its leaves are slow to wilt.

Curled Parsley

Name: *Petroselinum crispum*

Zones: 5 to 9

Size: 12 to 18 inches tall and wide

Conditions: Full sun to partial shade; moist, well-drained soil

Description

Curled parsley is aptly named for the clean, fresh, crispy taste of the tightly bunched, bright green leaves. This crispiness is one of parsley's best attributes, adding texture and color when added just before serving.

How to grow parsley

Seed germination is variable. Start seeds indoors by soaking them in warm water for 48 hours, 10 to 12 weeks before the last frost. Change the water once, and rinse seeds before planting them.

Once planted, cover them with soil and exclude light. Late-sown seeds will provide less mature plants for overwintering indoors, but expect them to lose vigor and need replacing the following season. To keep plants vigorous the entire season, cut them back occasionally and then fertilize.

Uses

This is the parsley that is the essential ingredient in the classic flavoring: bouquet garni, along with thyme and bay leaves. Together with tarragon, chives and chervil, parsley helps make up the traditional French flavoring blend of fine herbs. Chopped and added at the last moment, it perks up sauces and salads.