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Herbs at the Frisco Farmers Market (left) photo by Chris Fritch; Fresh Lavander (below) photo by Kathleen Noble



## Take the Thyme

By Kathleen Noble

THERE ARE TIMES when I can conjure up the heady aroma of chives that must have grown wild in the backyard of my childhood home and the smell of the mint that grew along side our neighbor, Mrs. Higgs' back porch. I can still imagine her bending to pinch a sprig or two of that mint to nestle against the ice cubes floating in her tall glass of sweet tea on a hot summer day.

As if I knew exactly what I was doing, I once consumed the parsley garnish that rested on the side of my plate during a dinner date in an upscale restaurant while I was still in high school. The memory and ensuing action of removing that bitter leaf from my mouth without being observed by my date, a room full of diners or wait staff, will certainly never be found in any book of etiquette. Emily Post would have run from the room in horror, and I considered it. Those experiences would be the sum total of my knowledge of herbs.

To further my, as well as other well meaning novice gardeners, knowledge of herbs Edith Hiett, Master Gardener with the Collin County Master Gardeners Association and editor of the *Herb Scene* newsletter distributed by Heritage Farmstead Herb Club in Plano, suggests it is often best to start indoor or outdoor herb gardens with herb choices you know you will use. Culinary herbs are usually the simplest and most practical for the newcomer.

The Collin County Master Gardeners Program is an educational service organization of volunteers trained in horticulture. Master Gardeners are available by phone to answer questions and to aid novice gardeners.

Culinary herbs such as coriander, rosemary, cilantro, thyme, basil and oregano primarily grown for flavoring foods and satisfying the palate are also known for their digestive properties. Herbs add

flavor to many main dishes, soups and can add dimension and flare to vegetables and desserts. Fresh herbs add depth of taste not always achieved when using a dried variety. Fresh herbs are best added toward the end of the cooking process for the best possible result. Herbal teas are all the rage and offer a scope of health benefits. Chamomile, ginger and jasmine teas offer a warm compliment to any meal.

Herbs are not only used for culinary flare in the kitchen but also hold great worth within the cosmetic industry and are customarily used for aromatics such as perfumes, air fresheners and potpourri. Since ancient times herbs have also been held in high regard for their medicinal value.

THE HERITAGE HERB CLUB is offering a \$400 scholarship to any student currently studying or interested in pursuing horticulture in college. To obtain an application contact Ms. Edith Hiett at 972.596.0299. The application deadline is June 30th.

Through both the Frisco Farmers Market, located at 6048 Frisco Square Blvd, and the Dallas Farmers Market, John Lumpkins, owner of the 50-acre Little John's Farm in Emory, Texas supplies shoppers with herbs, fruits and vegetables delivered fresh from the farm. Mr. Lumpkins raises several varieties of mint and sage, as well as cilantro, parsley and thyme all available in 4" pots ready for snipping or to be repotted in your container or



Fresh Tarragon & Stevia  
photo by Chris Fritchie

## Herb Sandwich Filling

- 1/2 c. onion, coarsley chopped
- 4 c. parsley
- 1 c. fresh basil
- 2 Tbsp. fresh oregano
- 4 Tbsp. lemon balm
- 2 Tbsp fresh dill (or 2 tsp. dried)
- 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1/3 c good quality processed mayonnaise
- Salt to taste

In small amounts, place onions and herbs in a bowl of food processor to chop very finely. Add Worcestershire sauce, mayonnaise and mix well until herbs are well moistened. Yields 1 cup.

Spread filling on buttered, thinly sliced bread. Pretty served as open faced sandwiches decorated with violet or chive blossoms. Buttering the bread keeps the sandwich from becoming soggy.

From *With Love*, from Cynthia

garden. Stevia is also grown on Mr. Lumpkin's homestead and is readily available at the Frisco Farmers Market. Stevia, a hearty herb from the sunflower family commonly referred to as sweet or sugarleaf, is used primarily as a sugar substitute.

According to Mr. Lumpkin, stevia is three times sweeter than sugar and

has drawn attention in medical research as a promising natural sweetener for individuals with diabetes or those restricted to carbohydrate-controlled diets.

Brandy Griffin, secretary of the Frisco Farmers Market, invites the public to visit the market each Saturday during the summer. There are 15 vendors currently selling farm-raised and organically grown fruits and vegetables and fresh herbs at the Frisco Farmers Market. The market is presented by the Frisco Lions Club and is funded yearly by generous sponsorships from individuals and businesses.

Herb gardens grown indoors add a fresh fragrance to home interiors and are a windowsill away from a family meal. Herbs grown inside, for the most part, enjoy a longer life away from severe weather conditions and outdoor garden pests.

Plant suggestions for indoor gardens consist of easily grown herbs such as dill, cilantro, chives, winter savory, rosemary, thyme, marjoram and tarragon although other varieties can also be successful.

As Ms. Hiett begins explaining one of her first attempts at using fresh herbs, she warns the novice gardener to choose literature and educational material written by authors familiar to your locale.

"I'd just grown one of my first herb gardens and I thought I'd make herbal vinegar. I worked in downtown Dallas, and at the time, was mostly a weekend gardener," she begins. "I filled several bottles with a crisp vinegar, added the

herbs and as the book on herb gardening instructed, I sat the bottles outside. Several days passed before I checked the bottles again. I was horrified. The bottles were filled with a dark slimy, sludge that can only be described as a science experiment gone bad. I couldn't imagine what went wrong. I consulted the book again, realizing at once that the author's locale had been Pennsylvania. She probably knew nothing of Texas summers.†

Ms. Hiett admits she starts herbs outdoors in small containers that can easily be transported indoors during the heat of the summer. "Not only is the Texas heat too much for many of the plants, city water conservation and rationing may limit outdoor watering days during the summer months," she added.

According to Ms. Hiett, sages and mints are prime herbal growing choices for the hot Texas weather and adds, "Herbs aren't just for cooking, they make beautiful additions to landscapes and offer excellent curb appeal and color."

One of the more tempting aspects of herb growing is the multitude of attractive ways in which they can be displayed and used indoors. Centerpieces of culinary herbs provide enormous eye appeal and allow dinner guests to flavor drinks and fare as well. Consider growing lavender or peppermint in a warm moist bathroom or using lemon balm or pineapple sage grown indoors to scent a living room.

Herbs are equally favored for crafting and gift giving with items such as lavender sachets for closets and drawers, scented hangers, potpourris and soaps and other beauty products such as herbal treatments for feet and hands.

Whatever your intention for your herb garden remember that some herbs are choosy about soil and some are hardly adaptable such as rosemary. Your own needs and preferences should be the only deciding factor in your choice of plants for herb gardening. Experience will reveal whether they will thrive in certain situations. Most herbs can be grown rather informally both indoors and out, in large gardens or in small patio pots and containers; but like any other plant they should be properly maintained, pruned and harvested as necessary.

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*Kathleen Noble is a freelance writer living in Wylie.*