



HERBS

What is It?

- Herbs are the leaves and flowers of plants and are used for flavor, fragrance, or medicine.
- The difference between an herb or spice is the part of the plant used. For example, the green leaves of the plant *Coriandrum sativum* are the herb cilantro. When using the seeds of the same plant, it is the spice coriander.
- There are two types of herbs: perennial herbs and annual herbs. Perennial herbs, like rosemary and thyme, live for more than one season and come back every spring. Annual herbs, like cilantro, die at the end of the harvest season and need to be planted by seed each year, though many annual herbs develop an abundant supply of seeds, which fall to the ground and regrow on their own the following year.
- Certain herbs, like basil, lemon balm, chives, dill, and thyme can help to ward off pests in the garden with their aromas.
- Basil was used in part of the process to preserve mummies in ancient Egypt.



Grow It

Herbs are a great and easy addition to any Washington garden, as they can be grown in beds, containers, and even indoors. Most thrive with at least six hours of direct sunlight and well-drained soil, but specific requirements will differ. Many hardy herbs can be planted several weeks before the last frost, while tender herbs should be planted outdoors only once the danger of frost has passed. Most herbs grown in the ground need little to no fertilizer.

Take note of whether herbs are perennials or annuals. A perennial is a plant that lives for many years, whereas an annual plant only lives one year. The local climate can impact whether a plant is a perennial or annual. For example, many varieties of rosemary do not do well outdoors in cold winters. They may act like perennials in the western side of the state where winters are milder, growing to several feet tall over many years. But in higher elevation areas on the eastern side of the state, less cold-hardy varieties of rosemary may die in the winter.



Parsley, credit: WSDA



Learning about Herbs

Learn It

Pre-K–5th Grade

What You Say	What You Do
<p>Today we are going to experience an herb garden with our five senses. Can you name the five senses?</p> <p>(Answer: sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste)</p>	<p>Bring children to an herb garden. If there is no herb garden available, provide children with two to three herbs and a placemat or tray.</p>
<p>We are going to use our senses one at a time to experience the herbs.</p>	<p>Point out the herb plants in the garden.</p> <p>With younger children (Pre-K –2nd), stand in a circle around one garden bed. With older children (3rd–5th), allow them to walk through the garden more independently.</p>
<p>First, let's use our sight. Let's all look at the leaves on the herb plant. What does it look like?</p>	<p>Show children the herb plants, exaggerate looking at the plant leaves and noticing what is unique about it.</p>
<p>Next, let's touch the plant. What do the leaves feel like?</p>	<p>Model touching the plant.</p>
<p>Now hold a piece of the herb in your fingers next to your ear and listen while you tear it apart. Did you hear it?</p>	<p>Model listening.</p>
<p>Herbs are known for having a really strong smell. You can rub the plant in your fingers and tear the leaves apart more to smell your herb. Do you recognize the smell?</p>	<p>Model smelling the plant.</p>





Learning about Herbs

Learn It

Pre-K–5th Grade

What You Say	What You Do
<p>Herbs also give our foods a lot of flavor. We add small amounts of herbs to food when we cook them to make them yummy. If you are feeling brave, you can try a taste of the herb. Use your thumb to show me, do you like the way it tastes? (Students may give thumbs up or down.)</p>	<p>Model trying the herb. Explain the idea “don’t yuck my yum” if appropriate.</p>
<p>Review what students learned about herbs.</p>	<p>Ask students to respectfully share their thoughts. If time allows, let them smell/taste other herbs in the garden.</p>

Note: this is a good activity for fall or winter, when woody herbs might be the only plants growing in the garden.

6th–12th Grade

What You Say	What You Do
<p>Herbs and other plants have been used for their medicinal purposes for thousands of years. One example is lemon balm. In traditional medicine, lemon balm has been used in teas, soaps, and other household items to reduce anxiety and help with digestion. Many medicines come from compounds in plants, or parts of plants.</p>	<p>Pass out a leaf of lemon balm, if available, for students to smell.</p>





Learning about Herbs

Learn It

6th–12th Grade

What You Say	What You Do
<p>Can anyone think of another plant that has a medicinal purpose? This could be a plant used in calming tea, to help you sleep, or to help with your digestion.</p> <p>(Other examples: ginger, aloe, chamomile, lavender.)</p>	<p>Provide ample time for students to reflect and respond. Provide additional examples to pass around if able.</p>
<p>We are going to take some time to research medicinal herbs. Using the internet, find one herb that has a medicinal purpose. Once you find a good resource, write two to three sentences about the herb and how it can help people.</p>	<p>Allow students to use laptops for research. Depending on preference, students can type responses or write with a pen and paper.</p> <p>Provide students with 10–5 minutes to research a medicinal herb and write 2–3 sentences about it. Circulate through the room to answer questions.</p>
<p>Now, partner with someone next to you and share what you learned. Each person has two minutes to share.</p>	<p>Pair students up to discuss. Set a timer and tell them to switch after two minutes.</p>
<p>Does anyone want to share what they learned with the class?</p>	
<p>As we learned, herbs have many different purposes, from providing flavor to our foods to medicinal properties. When you go home, pay attention to the ways that herbs might show up in teas, lotions, or other household items to help you.</p>	<p>Collect papers or have students turn in assignments.</p>

Note: students may have varying experiences with this based on their cultural background and familiarity with plants.



Kale Salad

Make It

Be sure to follow local Food Safety rules and regulations. Learn more here: [Food Safety Rules and Regulations](#) | [Washington State Department of Health](#).

Recipe: Herb Water Yield: 4 cups	
Ingredients	Directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 small leaves or a small sprig of herbs (mint, basil, or rosemary) • 4 cups water 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wash the herbs thoroughly under cool running water. 2. Tear or crush the herb leaves. 3. Add herbs to water and refrigerate several hours or overnight to allow the most flavoring. 4. Refrigerate until ready to serve. 5. Drink within two days for best quality.

Notes: Keep it safe! Do not mix batches of flavored water. Use it up, clean the container, then make a fresh batch.

Recipe adapted from [Oregon Food Hero](#).

Explore interactive taste test resources to encourage participants to try what you made!
[Taste-Testing Event Resources](#)



Thyme, credit: WSDA

Eat It

- Herbs contain a wide variety of vitamins and antioxidants, but since they are typically added to foods in small quantities to add flavor, they do not add much nutritional value to the dish; however, herbs can be added to nutritious foods like roasted vegetables or fresh salads to make them more flavorful and fun to eat.

Play It

- Chef Chlorophyll: Students learn how plants use photosynthesis to make food from carbon dioxide, sunlight, and water through this playful skit.



Read It

- Mother Goose's Herbal Tales: Nature's Little Helpers, by Jessy Masson and Erin Bailey
- Sage Advice for Garden Herbs, by Amy Avant
- The Spice Box, by Meera Sriram
- The Wondrous World of Herbs: A Kids' Guide to Herbal Wisdom: An Herbal Reference Guide for Budding Botanists, by Cynthia Schreiber
- The Cook's Herb Garden, by Jeff Cox

More About It

- Lesson for 3rd–5th grade: [Tasty Testing | Washington Agriculture in the Classroom](#)



Sage, credit: WSDA