

GROWING HERBS FOR PROFIT

Your Guide to the Top Twenty
Culinary & Medicinal Herbs

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Introduction



Herbs have been used in cooking, medicine and cosmetics for thousands of years. Now, herbs are being rediscovered, as people around the globe seek a healthier and more natural lifestyle. Herbs also provide a link to our past – a time when the pace was slower, things were simpler and almost everyone had a backyard herb garden.

Herbal use has grown dramatically in recent years. Today, you'll find cooks using more fresh herbs. New medical research has shown many herbs can be useful as healthy alternatives to expensive drugs. In Germany, for example, doctors write seven times as many prescriptions for St. John's Wort as for Prozac when treating patients for depression! Walk into almost any retail store, and you'll find herbs used in an amazing variety of products – soaps, candles, teas, potpourris, medicines, and bath oils.

Although Europeans use almost four times more cooking herbs than we Americans, this is changing fast, as cooks discover the benefits of cooking with fresh herbs. Thanks to the influence of cooking magazines, TV

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cooking shows, and a growing level of culinary awareness, more and more consumers are buying potted herbs to grow and use at home.

Europeans also use more herbs for medicinal purposes than Americans. In Germany, a medical council called “Commission E” reviews herbs for safety and effectiveness, and it’s recommendations are used by doctors throughout Europe, and by a growing number of doctors in North America as well.

It’s easy for a newcomer to the herb business to get overwhelmed by all the choices. You can focus on just growing herbal plants, making herbal products or decorations, grow herbs for the fresh-cut market, grow and dry herbs, sell to the wholesale and bulk herb buyers – the list goes on!

It’s important for newcomers to find a niche that fits both their experience level, skills and the local market. Starting a backyard herb nursery can be a wonderful way for herbal beginners to turn their love of plants and gardening into cash. It’s one of the best ways to “bootstrap” a few hundred dollars into a good part-time or full-time income. In this guide, you’ll learn how to grow and market the ten most popular culinary and the ten most popular medicinal herbs, using potted plants as your special “niche.”

The secret to making good money with a backyard herb nursery is to specialize in high demand popular plants that can be container grown to

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save space, time and water. Just one small backyard mini-greenhouse (also called a “hoophouse”) with 100 square feet of growing space will hold 400 – 6 inch potted herb plants with a retail value of over \$2400. One grower, limited to a fifty foot wide backyard, was able to set up eight of these growing beds, earning over \$20,000 in three months.

In addition to selling potted herb plants, you’ll learn about “value-added” herb products, such as herbal pet products, herbal windowsill gardens, and dream pillows to produce sales even after the selling season for potted plants is over.

Remember to start small and learn from your growing and marketing success and mistakes. After you’ve grown the basic herbs listed in this guide for a season or two, you’ll be better equipped to expand into other herbs or other varieties of the same herbs. Be careful not to offer too many herb choices to your potted herb customers, as it just makes it harder to choose which ones to buy.

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Top Ten Culinary Herbs

BASIL (*Ocimum basilicum*) Basil is the most popular culinary herb. There are many popular varieties to choose from, but you should stick to common sweet basil when you are first starting out.



Basil is an extremely tender plant, and should not be put outdoors until all frost danger is past. Start the seeds indoors in a transplant plug tray (Speedling trays, from www.groworganic.com are the best. The 200 plug tray works great for herbs.

The seeds should germinate in 7-10 days. Mist the soil every day until sprouts appear. When the new seedlings are about 3 inches high, transplant to a larger pot and fertilize with a liquid seaweed or fish fertilizer, watering as needed.

By keeping a cover on your growing beds, the tender basil plants will adapt to the cooler outdoors. When flower buds start to form, pinch out the buds to encourage leafy growth.