



Your Full Service Nursery & Landscape Center  
Since 1987  
3166 Willow Creek Road, Prescott  
www.mortimer-nursery.com  
776-8000 / [info@mortimer-nursery.com](mailto:info@mortimer-nursery.com)

## Growing Herbs Indoors and Harvesting Your Garden Herbs

It is getting colder and time to bring some of our garden herbs indoors for the winter. Here are some ideas on how to do that and how to keep them healthy and thriving. The best soil mix for all potted herbs is a cactus mix type of soil. It is loose and allows air to get to the roots. Almost always, indoor herbs are killed because their roots cannot breathe. Loosen the soil around the plants you wish to move, getting as many roots as possible and pot them up right away. Put them in a sunny window. Herbs do not require much fertilizer, but do benefit from a weak solution of a liquid houseplant type of fertilizer, given once or twice a month. The other important thing is, do not over-water the plants. Let them dry out an inch down in the pot before watering and then water them well and then wait 1-2 weeks before watering again. Do not let water stand in their saucers. If you see signs of wilting, drooping leaves, check to see if water is needed. If the soil is already moist, let it dry out and apply an organic type of fungicide, such as Fertilome Triple Action, which is derived from the Neem tree. Some herbs are challenging, so go with the ones that do well for you.



Here is a list of some herbs that can be brought indoors:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Care</u>	<u>Hints once they are indoors</u>
<b>Basil</b>	Easy	Keep snipping to prevent flowering. When plants become woody, compost them and start more from seed.
<b>Chives</b>	Easy	Pot up the plant and leave it outside until frost kills the foliage. It will re-sprout in a few weeks.
<b>Mint</b>	Moderate	Mint prefers cool, humid conditions. Make a humidity tray by setting the pot on a tray of pebbles filled with water. Allow for its spreading root system by making sure the pot is wider than it is deep.
<b>Oregano</b>	Easy	Oregano likes good drainage, slightly dry soil, and regular pruning.
<b>Parsley</b>	Moderate	Challenging to transplant because it has a deep taproot. Best to start from seed.

**Rosemary** Finicky      Rosemary needs moist air and well-drained (but not dried-out) soil. Brown needle tips mean over-watering.

**Sage**      Easy      Forgiving when you forget to water, sage likes regular pruning.

**Thyme**      Easy      Compost plants once stems become thick and woody. Prune often to encourage new growth.

### *Harvesting Herbs*

In ancient times, every cottage had bunches of herbs hanging from the rafters, ready to use as needed for culinary and medicinal purposes. It is very satisfying to use dried herbs from your own garden. It is not a difficult thing to do. There are a few things to keep in mind for success in your harvesting.

Cut your herbs in midday so they are dry. There should be no moisture on the leaves. Cut the stems when the blooms are just beginning to open for optimum flavor. The essential oil in an herb plant is at its strongest when the plant is making its flowers. So you want to harvest them when flowering is beginning.

Cut the stems as long as you can, gathering them in bunches of 10-12 stems. Secure bunches with strong rubber bands. Too many stems in a bunch is not good as the center of the bunch may not get enough air and mold could develop, spoiling the herbs. Hang your bunches in a warm, dry place until they are crisp and dried. Do not hang them in direct sunlight. A water heater closet is ideal. Another idea is to use your car as your dehydrator by placing the stems in paper trays, covering them with newspaper and putting them on the back seat. Just let the car sit in the sun and usually, the herbs will be dried in a day or two. Plus your car smells good, especially if you are drying lavender or mint.

Once your herbs are dried, you have several options. You can strip the leaves off the stems and store them whole in brown glass or plastic jars until you need them. Always remember to identify each jar or you will have mystery herbs!! You can keep bunches intact, placing them in paper bags, marked with their names and stored in a sealable plastic tub until needed. I like to strip off enough leaves of each herb to fill a small spice jar so I have them ready to use in my spice cabinet. Remember that as the leaves are broken and crushed, the essential oils dissipate, lessening the flavor of your herbs. Keep the leaves as whole as possible until you need them. Then when you are ready, you can make different blends using a simple coffee grinder to grind the leaves as coarse or as fine as you wish. Do not grind coffee or other items in that grinder. Use it only for herbs. Your harvested herbs will last one to two years so throw out the old ones to make way for the new ones!

