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Landscaping with Herbs

by Mary Sisson Eibs

In years when winter is mild, any herbs which would freeze in colder years continue to thrive. All winter I'm tempted to get out there and put in my tender annuals despite the possible threat of frost. It's difficult not to "rush the season".

My first herb gardens were mainly planted with herbs which I could use for cooking but through the years I've started to consider other characteristics when choosing plants. Now I think about things such as color, texture, height, and flowering characteristics of each herb. Last year, I added lamb's ears which has soft gray leaves and lovely long violet blooms, yarrow with its feathery green leaves and delicate cream flowers, variegated sage, which has lovely foliage but a strong, slightly unpleasant odor, garlic chives with long gray and white leaves, scented geraniums, various types of lavender, lemon grass, and curly parsley. I have also included some flowers such as white alyssum, which attracts beneficial insects and smells lovely, light blue pansies which are edible, purple basil with beautiful blue and pink flowers, and some potted herbs and flowers for visual contrast.

Even though I don't use all of these plants in cooking, I've found that my herb garden is more visually attractive and I enjoy learning about some of the more unusual herbs. In *Using Herbs in the Landscape*, by Debra Kirkpatrick, the author lists the following characteristics for consideration in planning an inviting and useful herb garden: Foliage color and texture, flower color, and fragrance. She provides examples of plants from each category which can be combined to create interesting focal points in the garden. Silver King Artemisia and Spanish lavender are two silver or gray choices which I have in my garden. Rose-scented geranium and Borage provide gray-green highlights. Chives and Russian sage add blue-green foliage and adding 'Purple Ruffles' basil and Tricolor sage will give colored or variegated accents.

Many herbs flower in beautiful and aromatic ways. Bee balm and pineapple sage have lovely red blossoms. Lettuce-leaf basil and French tarragon produce white flowers, and for blue or purple highlights try English lavender or Upright rosemary. For orange or gold accents you might add Nasturtiums or French marigolds. Yellow flowering Dill or Lady's mantle will brighten up your garden. and add Purple coneflower or Lamb's ears for pink, rose, or lavender flowers.

Using Herbs in the Landscape also discusses various themes which one could include when planning an herb garden. A sensory garden could include aromatic, flavorful, textured, and colorful herbs. Ethnic themes such as Native American herbs or Mexican culinary herbs would be interesting. A Colonial American herb garden would include herbs used for medicine, dyes, flavor, fragrance, and household use. I have seen examples of biblical gardens also which would include historically important herbs based upon bible references. The author suggests that if you plant a theme garden, you should include labels since some of the plants may not be familiar to the viewer.

I hope you will experiment with color, texture or theme in planning this year's herb garden. If you need advice inquire at any local nursery selling herbs or consult *Using Herbs in the Landscape*, by Debra Kirkpatrick. You'll find that by adding a few accents your visitors will comment on your unusual additions and you will have an opportunity to share your knowledge or these lovely plants with others.