



Vernacular

**A resource guide for VIVA!
Garden for Schools, a joint
project of the LAUSD Nutrition
Network, VIVA! Plants, and
The Home Depot.**

Information/Cultivation/Harvesting

Greek Oregano *Oreganum heracleoticum*, Perennial Shrub

The sweet and spicy scent of Greek Oregano is said to have been created by the Goddess Aphrodite as a symbol of happiness. Bridal couples were crowned with garlands of oregano and the plants were placed on tombs to give peace to departed spirits. Greek Oregano, like all culinary oreganos, has a white flower, ovate, fuzzy leaves and grows up to 16" high in bloom.

Plant in full sun about 1-foot apart. In containers, plant with other herbs that thrive in well-drained, slightly dry soil. Oregano leaves are most flavorful before plants flower. Store fresh leaves in plastic bags and refrigerate. To dry, cut and hang stalks in a warm, airy location.

Sweet Basil *Ocimum basilicum*, Annual Shrub

Basil is native to India and Asia—having been cultivated there for more than 5,000 years. Basil is enjoyed for its rich and spicy, and mildly peppery flavor with a hint of mint and clove. Basil is an annual herb that belongs to the mint family, Lamiaceae (Labiatae) and like others in this family, basil can be identified by its square, hairy stems. There are over 40 known varieties of basil of which Sweet Basil is the most commonly known and grown. *Ocimum* is from a Greek verb that means, "to be fragrant." The foliage is easily bruised; just rubbing against its foliage releases a wonderfully spicy fragrance.

Plant in full sun about 6-inches apart. Soil should be well-drained, but remain evenly moist. Basil is very susceptible to frost damage. Pick off fresh young leaves as you need them, and pinch off entire stems before flowers finish blooming to prolong harvest.

Lavender *Lavandula angustifolia*, Perennial Shrub

The *angustifolia* are often referred to as English Lavender but *angustifolia* just means narrow leaves. Like its Labiatae relatives such as mints, marjorams, sages and thymes, lavender is characterized by four-sided stems and oils that account for its versatility and fantastic fragrance.

These are the hardiest lavenders, tolerating temperatures that reach 0 degrees. All lavenders need as much sun as you can give them and loose, well-draining soil. Over-fertilizing this plant will detract from the scent it produces, which is true for many herbs. All are early blooming and great for drying. Pinch off a few fresh leaves as you need them for cooking, or cut back whole stems for drying.

Nutrition/Uses

In one teaspoon, oregano has 6 calories, 138 IU of Vitamin A, 5 mcg. of Folic Acid, 33 mg. of Potassium, 32 mg. of Calcium, and 5 mg. of Magnesium.

Oregano, a staple of Mediterranean and Mexican cooking, is used to flavor numerous dishes including tomato-based sauces for pastas and pizzas, fajitas, and antipasto marinades.

In two tablespoons, fresh basil has 1 calorie, 193 IU of Vitamin A, 3 mcg. of Folic Acid, 23 mg. of Potassium, 3 mg. of Calcium, and 4 mg. of Magnesium.

Basil is a companion to tomatoes both in the garden and on the plate. It is used in tomato sauces and pestos, goes well with cucumbers, and flavors olive oil and vinegar for salad dressings.

Lavender is rarely used as a culinary herb, so nutrition information is not available.

Lavender has been used (in small quantities) to flavor breads and sweet dishes. Lavender also goes well with citrus—try it in a cool citrus salad.

Information/Cultivation/Harvesting

French Thyme *Thymus vulgaris*, Perennial Groundcover

Thymes are native to the Mediterranean region and thrive in warm, dry locations. Historically thyme has been held as a symbol of courage. Another interpretation is that its name is derived from the Greek verb "to fumigate," because the branches were once burned to keep away insects.

Thymes thrive in full sun and dry soil. Good drainage and air circulation are absolute musts for these members of the Lamiaceae family. Plants should be spaced 6 to 12 inches apart. Although they appear delicate and difficult to grow, they are actually very tough and can survive for years with minimal attention. To keep thyme in peak health just cut back mature plants after they flower in summer to encourage bushiness, or dig up and divide overgrown plants.

Peppermint *Mentha piperita*, Perennial Groundcover

All species of genus *Mentha* are aromatic, although not in all is the aroma as pure as in peppermint. Greeks and Romans crowned themselves with Peppermint at their feasts and adorned their tables with its stems. Their cooks flavored both their sauces and their wines with its essence.

Plant peppermint in well drained soil and partial shade with at least 4 hours of sun. Since they spread by creeping and rooting as they go, they make excellent groundcovers; in fact, planting in containers is the only way to contain this pernicious herb. To keep plants bushy and thick, cut back nearly to the ground in winter. Propagation is easy—stems can be shallowly planted or rooted in water and then planted. Mint can be harvested throughout the growing season, but is most flavorful before the plant flowers (some say mint should be harvested by the light of the moon).

French Tarragon *Artemesia dracunculus*, Perennial

Although tarragon was brought to America by the early colonists, it is not very widely used in the United States. And while its flavor is often described as one of the most delicate of the culinary herbs, it is a relative of the tough, tolerant wormwood and sagebrush. In fact, tarragon does well in all but the coldest regions, but does best where there is a dormant period in the winter.

Tarragon will grow best in full sun and a well-draining soil. Root rot is very common where the soil remains consistently moist. Plants are drought tolerant once established. Space plants about 1 foot apart to allow for bushier growth. To encourage more leaves to form, cut plants back in summer when they begin to flower.

Nutrition/Uses

In one teaspoon, fresh thyme has 1 calorie, 48 IU of Vitamin A, 6 mg. of Potassium, 4 mg. of Calcium, and 2 mg. of Magnesium.

Many chefs believe that thyme is the essence of French cookery. Excellent in stuffing, soups, fish, vegetables (particularly carrots and beets), savory meat, game and fowl. Thyme is one of the most versatile of the culinary herbs.

Nutrition information for peppermint is unavailable.

Mix whole peppermint leaves into lemonade and tea for a cool, refreshing drink. Peppermint can also be combined with yogurt for a flavorful topping to cucumbers, melons, and strawberries. Peppermint is also a great addition to citrus dishes—cooked or fresh.

Nutrition information for tarragon is unavailable.

True French tarragon is one of the most desirable (and scarce) culinary herbs. Its sweet, slight licorice flavor is an important ingredient in French cuisine. It is a wonderful addition to chicken or beef and is excellent as a flavoring for vinegar. To use Tarragon, chop the leaves very fine to extract the flavor. Add it to tuna or chicken salads, eggs and quiches, mayonnaises, and mustard salad dressings. It can also be combined with dill and parsley for fish.

Information, Cultivation & Harvesting

Golden Sage *Salvia officinalis*, Perennial Shrub

Sage was used extensively in the Middle Ages to mask the taste of rancid meat. It aided in the digestion of fatty foods and its mild antiseptic action helped people live through a rotten meal.

Sages like to grow in well-drained soil with lots of sunshine. Over-watering and over-feeding will most assuredly kill sage. Sage is a great container plant, and can tolerate small containers—12-inches wide and deep is just fine. Most pests leave it alone except grasshoppers and a few caterpillars, who love the taste of the leaves. Cut back flower stems after blooming to encourage more leaf growth. Fresh leaves can be stored (briefly) in plastic bags in the refrigerator, or can be dried and stored in a glass jar in a dark place.

Rosemary *Rosmarinus officinalis*, Perennial Shrub

Rosemary comes from the Latin *ros*, "dew," and *marinus*, "of the sea". Rosemary has been valued through the ages more for its rituals than for cooking. Used at both weddings and funerals, the herb symbolizes remembrance, loyalty, and love.

Rosemary is one tough plant. It's originally from the hillsides of the Mediterranean Sea, so it's accustomed to dry winds, poor soils and lots of hot sun. It will thrive in well-draining soil that is kept moist, but not wet. They also do well in very poor soils—don't overfeed as their succulent leaves will be a much more delicious target for pests. To harvest, clip leaves or stems as needed. Fresh rosemary can be stored in the refrigerator in plastic bags or closed containers. For longer storage, rosemary freezes well, and can be dried by hanging upside down in a warm (but not hot), dark, dry place.

Cilantro *Coriandrum sativum*, Annual

Cilantro is native to the Mediterranean, and is one of the oldest herbs in cultivation, with more than 3,000 years of recorded use. The plant is mentioned in Sanskrit literature and has been found in the tombs of Egyptian pharaohs and Grecian ruins from the Bronze Age. It is a member of Umbelliferae, the carrot and parsley family. Notice the "umbrella" in the name? This is because the tiny flowers form umbrella-like clusters as high as 2-feet above the plant. The flowers are an excellent source of nectar for many beneficial insects, and growing cilantro can keep pests under control.

Well-drained soil, regular water and regular feeding are required for achieving a plentiful harvest. It will thrive in both sun and partial shade. To harvest, young leaves can be pinched off and used right away, or blend with olive oil and freeze the mixture to keep the flavor. Seeds can be dried in paper bags for later use.

Nutrition & Uses

In one teaspoon, dried ground sage has 3 calories, 59 IU of Vitamin A, 11 mg. of Potassium, 17 mg. of Calcium, and 4 mg. of Magnesium.

Sage is almost always found in Thanksgiving stuffing, but is also an excellent herb to flavor winter squashes—especially Butternut squash. It is also widely used to flavor pork and lamb for roasting. Fresh baked bread flavored with sage is a real treat.

In one teaspoon, dried rosemary has 7 calories, 63 IU of Vitamin A, 19 mg. of Potassium, 26 mg. of Calcium, and 4 mg. of Magnesium.

Rosemary is great in herb butter and of course for lamb. You can eat the flower too, perfect for salads. Use rosemary branches for skewers or dampen them and toss them on the BBQ grill to add flavor to grilled meat or vegetables.

If you have a lot of rosemary that you've pruned, throw a few dried sprigs on a winter's fire for a great aroma.

In 1/4 cup, fresh cilantro has 1 calorie, 111 IU of Vitamin A, 22 mg. of Potassium, 4 mg. of Calcium, and 1 mg. of Magnesium.

Also known as Chinese parsley, cilantro is one of the main ingredients in salsas, and it has hundreds of other uses in the kitchen. Commonly used in Latin American and Asian cuisine, cilantro has become a popular herb in the United States over the last few years. All parts of the plant are useful, including the seeds—called coriander—which are often added to cookies and breads.

Information, Cultivation & Harvesting

Chives *Allium schoenoprasum*, Perennial Clumping Grass

The chive plant is the smallest member of the onion family. Known as “cives” in earlier times, it was usually grouped with onions, whose history reaches back about 5,000 years. Plants develop thick clumps to 10-inches in diameter comprised of small bulbs with hollow onion-like leaves. Small puffs of globe-shaped lavender edible flowers generally begin to bloom in late May or June, and make this an appealing garden perennial for attractive borders or individual plantings.

Chives thrive in full sun and well-drained soil rich in organic matter. They will tolerate light shade, but 6-8 hours of direct light is best. To keep plants from going dormant, keep flowers picked, and divide clumps every three years in the winter. To harvest, use sharp scissors and cut leaves about 2 inches above the ground. Use fresh, or dry in the oven and store in an airtight container.

Cherry Tomato *Lycopersicon esculentum*, Annual Vine

Tomatoes are America’s favorite vegetable—although as late as the early 1800s, they were believed to be fatally poisonous. Tomatoes were the first “fruits” to be classified as a “vegetable” by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1887. From the Hidalgo region in Mexico, these sweet cherries have full flavor and great texture. This is an indeterminate type variety—which means these plants continue to grow and produce fruit until cold weather hits.

Indeterminate tomatoes need lots of space (or trellising), a sunny location, well-drained evenly moist soil, and a low-nitrogen plant food. A thick layer of mulch will help tomatoes through periods of intense heat and drought. Harvest when skin is fully colored and between firm and soft in texture. Store at room temperature, refrigerate only those that are overripe. To ripen underripe fruits, place on a rack in a warm, dark location.

Jalapeno Pepper *Capsicum annuum*, Tender Perennial Shrub

Chili peppers are native to South America. They range in hotness from mild (1) to flaming hot (10)—Jalapenos are usually in the 4-6 range. The burning sensation when eating a chili pepper is attributed to chemical compounds called capsaicinoids, which are found in the light-colored ribs attaching the seeds to the walls. Capsaicin acts on the pain receptors in the mouth, not the taste buds. Experts agree that long hot dry summers produce the hottest chili peppers.

Jalapenos like warm weather, full sun, well-drained soil high in organic material, a steady supply of water, a thick layer of mulch, and staking to keep upright. They thrive in containers. Harvest (using rubber gloves, if sensitive) at any color stage (green, yellow, orange, or red) by using scissors to cut off the fruit. Keep them picked for continued production. Store like tomatoes.

Nutrition & Uses

In one tablespoon, fresh chives have 1 calorie, 131 IU of Vitamin A, 9 mg. of Potassium, 3 mg. of Calcium, and 1 mg. of Magnesium.

Chives’ grass-like leaves have a mild onion flavor and are used fresh in salads, dips, potatoes (especially baked), cucumbers, and other vegetable dishes. The flowers are edible, and can be used in salads as well as in flower arrangements. Chives and chive blossoms make attractive and delicious garnishes for a wide array of savory dishes.

In one medium fruit, fresh tomatoes have 26 calories, 766 IU of Vitamin A, 23 mg. of Vitamin C, 273 mg. of Potassium, and 18 mcg. of Folic Acid.

Tomatoes are the main ingredient in virtually thousands of dishes from the Americas to Europe and beyond. Cherry tomatoes are best used fresh in salads, but can also be chopped for salsas, pureed for soups, cooked for sauces, and even baked. Very flavorful tomatoes can also be dried and then finely chopped or pureed with fresh or dried herbs for an intense tomato-flavored spread.

In one medium fruit, fresh chili peppers have 18 calories, 347 IU of Vitamin A, 109 mg. of Vitamin C, 153 mg. of Potassium, and 11 mcg. of Folic Acid.

Chili peppers are widely used in Latin American, Caribbean, Eastern European, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, African, Indian and Thai cuisines. They are what make salsas, chilies, curries, and chutneys spicy. To cut down on the heat, cut the pepper lengthwise and remove the seeds and ribs. If the heat is unbearable, drink milk, not water, to cool off your mouth.

Information, Cultivation & Harvesting

Yellow Crookneck Squash *Cucurbita pepo*, Annual Shrub

Squash, like tomatoes, is native to the Americas and was a staple of the Native American diet. One of the infamous “Three Sisters” (squash, corn, and beans), is an excellent example of companion planting. By the late 1600s, squash became one of the most cherished foods of the colonists. Cultivars can be classified as summer or winter types. Summer squash include yellow straight and crookneck, zucchini, scallop, and spaghetti squashes. Winter squash include acorn and butternut.

Any moderately fertile, well-drained garden soil in full sun produces excellent yields of summer squash. Be sure to give them plenty of room and water regularly with sub-surface soaker hoses to keep powdery mildew at bay. Fruits can be harvested at any size, but are best when about 6” long and the skin is still glossy and relatively soft. Store in plastic bags in the refrigerator.

Sugar Lace Peas *Pisum sativum*, Annual Vine

Peas are members of the huge and wonderful family, Fabaceae (until recently Leguminosae), the legumes, which are as nutritious as they are delicious. Other members of the Fabaceae family are all the beans from chickpeas to soy. Peas, which originated in the area between western Asia and Eastern Europe are an ancient crop used for food since the Stone Age. Snap peas, like Snow Peas, have edible pods and seeds.

Peas prefer partial shade and a well-drained but damp soil rich in organic matter. Peas are legumes, and have the ability to capture nitrogen from the atmosphere, so use a fertilizer with moderate amounts of phosphorus and potassium, but low in nitrogen (N-P-K of 1:5:5). Peas use tendrils to climb up trellises, which increases their access to light and fresh air. Harvest daily and use immediately or refrigerate in plastic bags for up to 5 days.

Lettuce – Gourmet Salad Blend *Lactuca sativa*, Annual

Lettuce is grown for its edible leaves. While the many species of wild lettuce are also in the genus *Lactuca*, and are edible, only the species *L. sativa* is particularly tasty. From this single species breeders have produced hundreds of varieties! These lettuces come in many shades of red and green, and several different leaf shapes and growing habits: looseleaf, Bibb, Romaine, Batavian, crisphead, deer tongue... the list goes on and on.

Lettuce likes fertile soil, lots of water, morning sun/afternoon shade, and cool weather. Few pests bother lettuce, except for slugs—they absolutely love the stuff! Keep your lettuce bed mulched and weed-free to keep slug populations down. Leaf lettuces can be harvested from the bottom—the growing tip can produce more leaves. Other types should be sliced off at ground level. Use immediately or store in plastic bags in the refrigerator.

Nutrition & Uses

In 1/2 cup, fresh yellow crookneck squash has 12 calories, 220 IU of Vitamin A, 138 mg. of Potassium, 5 mg. of Calcium, and 14 mg. of Magnesium.

Squash are excellent raw (when young) or cooked. A tasty dish is sautéed sliced squash, chopped onions, a little salt and pepper. Squash blossoms are edible raw or cooked. Both summer and winter squash blossoms can be incorporated into a cheese quesadilla, or filled with cheese and heated until warm for a wonderful taste experience.

In 1/2 cup, boiled sugar snap peas have 36 calories, 200 IU of Vitamin A, 2.6 g. of Protein, 36 mg. of Calcium, and 31 mg. of Vitamin C.

Sugar snap peas can be used fresh in salads, or drizzled with a simple marinade of balsamic vinegar and Dijon mustard. They are also used in traditional oriental stir-fry dishes and vegetable sautés.

In 1/2 cup, fresh looseleaf lettuce has 5 calories, 532 IU of Vitamin A, 74 mg. of Potassium, 19 mg. of Calcium, and 3 mg. of Magnesium.

Lettuce is the staple of most green salads. New, packaged varieties of ready-to-use salads include many different varieties of lettuce. To improve the nutrition of salads, use lettuce as a base, but add spinach, tomatoes, carrots, peppers, and onions; or use Mesclun Greens, which is a mix of lettuce with arugula, chervil, endive, and other leafy vegetables and herbs.

Information, Cultivation & Harvesting

Everbearing Strawberry *Fragaria x ananassa*, Perennial

Growing your own strawberries that come back year after year is rewarding as well as economical. They are relatively easy to grow and they do not take up a lot of space in the garden. Everbearing strawberries produce one crop in spring and another in fall.

Strawberries require full sun, rich well-draining soil, even moisture, and well-balanced feeding twice per year (when growth begins and after first crop). Strawberries may be grown in rows or mounds. The mounding method is best for Everbearing types or in areas where drainage is a problem. Plant about 14-inches apart (not too deep or the crown will rot), and mulch with straw to keep fruits away from pillbugs and slugs. They produce runners that can be pinched-off and replanted to expand your patch (or share with a fellow gardener). Harvest strawberries with scissors when they are plump and fully-colored.

Nutrition & Uses

In 1 cup, fresh strawberries have 45 calories, 220 IU of Vitamin A, 84 mg. of Vitamin C, 247 mg. of Potassium, 84 mg. of Calcium, and 26 mcg. of Folic Acid.

Strawberries are a very versatile fruit. Not only are they great when combined with bananas in a smoothie, but they are also wonderful with cubed melons, citrus fruits, shaved fresh ginger, and even by themselves with a balsamic vinegar and black pepper marinade.

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