

*Taylor's* 50 *BEST*

Herbs & Edible Flowers



*Easy Plants for More Beautiful Gardens*

TAYLOR'S 50 BEST

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*Herbs & Edible Flowers*

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Pownal, Vermont

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TAYLOR'S 50 BEST

# *Herbs & Edible Flowers*

Take the guesswork out of gardening. Instead of the disappointments of trial and error, you can get it right the first time with the help of the editors of "*the best guides on the market*" (*Garden Design* magazine).

Herbs and edible flowers are among the most satisfying plants you can grow. With the right selections, they are also among the easiest. Whether you want to grow herbs to use in cooking, for fragrance, for sentiment, or to dry for winter bouquets, you will find in this book the most sure-fire plants to grow in your own garden, plus:

- Full-color photographs of every plant
- Easy-to-follow illustrations of special techniques for growing and using the featured plants
- Practical tips from experts
- When to plant, how to harvest, and the best methods for preserving your herbs

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GARDENING



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*Herbs & Edible Flowers*

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*Frances Tenenbaum, Series Editor*



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# INTRODUCTION

Of the many types of plants that grow in our gardens, herbs hold a very special place. For centuries, we have studied them, grown them, and used them. Humanity, it seems, cultivated herbs even before it cultivated civilization. In short, herbs have been our partners for a very long time.

People have used herbs to heal their bodies, calm their minds, add fragrance to their homes, and flavor and preserve their foods. They have been used to stuff mattresses, repel pests, and attract butterflies and birds to soothe our spirits. Herbs improve the quality of our lives. In a world as fast-paced as ours, this is, indeed, a very special contribution.

## Herbs as Magic

The value of herbs has never been questioned by the societies that used them. However, just how they accomplish their myriad wonders has been a mystery through the ages. For generations, science was not sophisticated enough to reveal the secrets of herbs. Lacking the scientific answers, people devised magical ones instead.

To the Egyptians, the onion was sacred; they believed that the layers of the bulb symbolized the different layers of the universe. Herbs were used to prepare the bodies of deceased pharaohs for their afterlife journey and to decorate their resting places. In ancient Greece, sweet bay was considered much more than a plant. This warm, spicy herb was regarded as the transformed nymph Daphne, who offered herself to the people as sweet bay to escape the unwanted advances of the god Apollo.

To other peoples, such as the Jews of the Middle East, herbs were considered medicines harvested from the earth by humans, but created and endowed with their curative powers by God.

## Finding Answers

Today, modern science has replaced the magic and mystery of herbs with logic and reason. The compounds and chemicals responsible for the many



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attributes of herbs are slowly but surely coming to light. The burning spiciness of hot peppers, the relaxing aroma of lavender, the soothing quality of chamomile—these and many other qualities of herbs have come under close scrutiny. Not surprisingly, many of the folk remedies and ancient uses ascribed to herbs have been validated by modern science. Hot peppers are still used to relieve pain, as they have been for hundreds of years; lavender still helps people get a good night's sleep; and chamomile is a favorite home remedy for an upset stomach. Science has cast a different light on our partnership with herbs, an illumination that continues to validate the importance and versatility of these wonderful plants.

## All the Best

This guide is a compendium of the most useful herbs commonly grown today—our best herb-garden partners. The plants are arranged alphabetically by scientific name, with the common name in large type just above the scientific one. Each plant is identified with a large photograph accompanied by an at-a-glance box with a brief list of important features, including plant hardiness, type and size, identifying characteristics, and the plant's principal uses. An introduction acquaints you with the herb's special attributes.

In “How to Grow” you'll find the necessary cultural techniques as well as the conditions required, such as the best type of soil, directions for watering, and maintenance techniques specific to the featured herb. The best method of propagation is also highlighted in this section—you'll know whether to sow seeds, take cuttings, or divide the plant to grow additional plants.

Following the growing information, you'll find the most common uses of the herb. Here the parts of the plant and their common uses are identified. Harvesting and storage techniques are included, along with methods of preparation. The colorful sidebar to the right contains tips and techniques to enhance your enjoyment of the plant.

When available, a list of varieties with special merit, called “Top Choices,” is also included. The unique qualities of each recommended plant are described there, so that you can easily choose those that meet your herb-gardening requirements.

At your fingertips, you have all the information you need to get started in herb gardening and to learn how to use and enjoy herbs all year long.



# ANISE HYSSOP

*Agastache foeniculum*



Zones: 4–8

Type: Perennial

Light: Full sun or part shade

Size: 4 ft. tall,  
2 ft. wide

Interest: Nectar-rich, red-purple flower spikes that attract bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds

Uses: Culinary, cut flowers, decorative, medicinal

Dense spikes of 3-inch-long, rose-violet blooms top the stiff upright stems of this neat, sweetly scented perennial. Anise hyssop stems have four sides, like other members of the mint family. Its common names—*anise hyssop*, *blue giant hyssop*, and *fennel giant hyssop*—derive from the plant's sweet licorice fragrance and similar appearance to *hyssop*, another member of the mint family. The soft, pointed leaves are flushed with purple in early spring and turn bright green by the time the plants are fully grown.

## HOW TO GROW

This pest-free herb is native to the North American prairies and thrives in average, well-drained soil in full sun to light shade. Too much shade or nitrogen fertilizer often produces a floppy plant that requires staking.



Sow seeds or transplant self-sown seedlings in spring. Divide in fall from Zone 7 south, and spring elsewhere. To keep the plant from increasing too rapidly, snip off the blossoms before they can produce seeds.

### HOW TO USE

The purple flower spikes of anise hyssop make lovely cut flowers and look handsome in a vase with other summer blooms. The dried flowers and leaves can be added to potpourri or used to make a refreshing anise-flavored tea. The fresh leaves and flowers are a spicy addition to salads and make a tea with a slightly sharper flavor than do dried leaves alone. The flowers add color and flavor to fruit pies, or try them with other edible flowers for a pretty garnish.

## Top Choices

- *A. foeniculum* 'Alabaster' has spikes of creamy white flowers and grows 2 feet tall and 1 foot wide.
- *A. x* 'Firebird' has aromatic leaves on 2-foot stems topped with spikes of rust-orange flowers.
- *A. x* 'Tutti Fruti' has strong 2-foot stems and burgundy blossoms.
- *A. rugosa*, Korean mint, grows 5 feet tall and 2 feet wide. Minty, aromatic leaves and spikes of purple flowers are characteristic. Zones 6 to 9.

## AIR DRYING ANISE HYSOP

To air-dry anise hyssop for use in tea or potpourri:

- 1 Cut stems, tie the base ends together with string, and hang upside down in a warm, dry space out of direct light.
- 2 To keep the bunch dust-free, place it in a brown paper bag punched with ventilation holes. Leaves usually take from five to seven days to dry.
- 3 When crumbly dry, remove the leaves and flowers from the stems and store them in an airtight glass jar.
- 4 Store the jar in a cool, dry, dark place until ready to use.



The attractive blossoms of anise hyssop make it welcome in the perennial border as well as the herb garden.



# HOLLYHOCK

*Alcea rosea*



Zones: 4–9

Type: Biennial or short-lived perennial

Light: Full sun

Size: 4–8 ft. tall, up to 2 ft. wide

Interest: Tall spikes of large flowers in every color but blue

Uses: Culinary, decorative

These tall, stately plants have long had a traditional place at the back of the border or herb garden. During their first year, the plants produce a low clump of rough foliage. The following year, each plant develops three to six strong stalks that reach up to 8 feet tall. Each stem is studded with buds that open from the bottom up to create huge, richly colored spikes of large, showy flowers with papery, overlapping petals. Hollyhock blossoms can be single or double and come in a wide range of colors including red, pink, yellow, tan, and maroon.

## HOW TO GROW

Hollyhocks thrive in ordinary, well-drained soil and prefer the warmer spots in the garden. In ideal conditions, new shoots arise from the crown of the original plant,



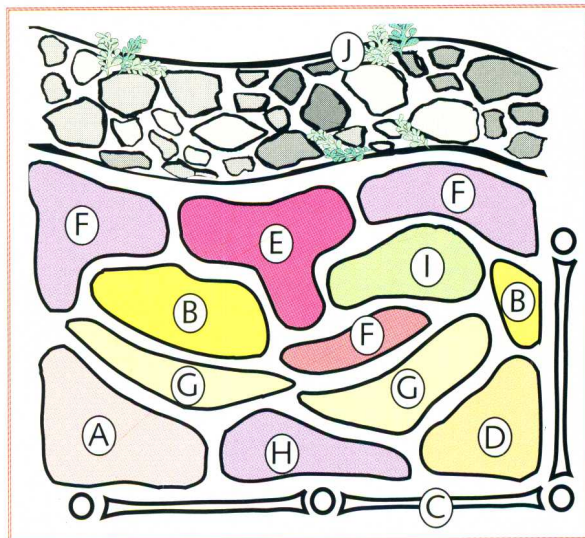
allowing an individual clump to produce flowers for a few more years. Self-sown plants are freely produced, ensuring hollyhock's presence in the garden. Space new plants far enough apart to ensure good air circulation. Most varieties require staking. Remove and destroy leaves diseased with hollyhock rust (yellow areas on upper leaf, orange dots underneath). Trim plants to the ground after blooming and remove all leaves and stems from the garden every fall. Pick off Japanese beetles, snails, slugs, and caterpillars by hand.

### HOW TO USE

Collect flowers as they open, and snip off and discard the bitter-tasting base of the petals. Dip in light batter and fry, or brew the petals in hot water for a tea traditionally used as a remedy for indigestion or sore throat. The purple petals of A. 'Nigra' add smoothness and a dark tea-like color to herbal teas.

## Top Choices

- A. 'Chater's Double' grows 8 feet tall, has fully double flowers, and comes in bright shades of pink, salmon, scarlet, and yellow.
- A. 'Nigra' bears single, 5- to 6-inch-wide, dark purple flowers on sturdy stems.
- A. 'Peaches 'n' Dreams' reaches 6 feet tall with abundant orange-peach, fully double blossoms.
- A. 'Summer Carnival' bears orange-bronze, double flowers on sturdy 5-foot stems.



### A VICTORIAN-STYLE COTTAGE GARDEN

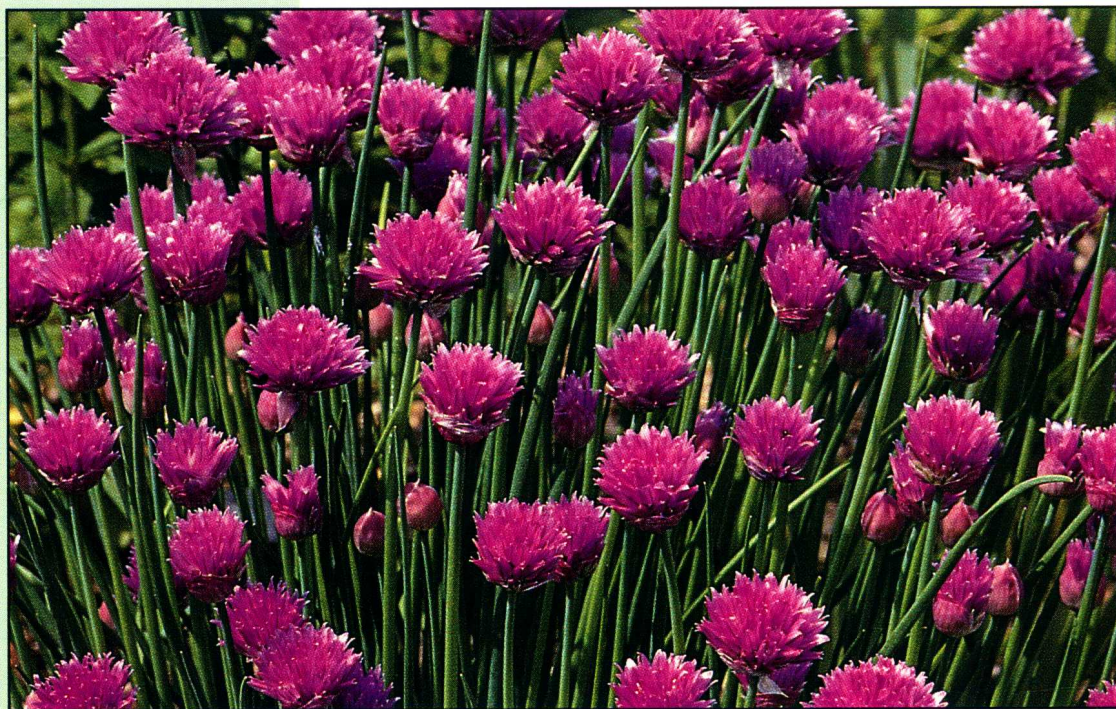
The hollyhock was a key element in the traditional English cottage garden, which was filled with plants and flowers useful for healing, cooking, and making pot-pourri. Cottage-garden plants with Old-World charm include:

- A *Alcea rosea*  
(hollyhock)
- B *Bellis perennis*  
(English daisy)
- C *Clematis*
- D *Delphinium*
- E *Dianthus* (pink)
- F *Lavandula angustifolia*  
(English lavender)
- G *Lilium* (lily)
- H *Rosa* (old garden roses)
- I *Stachys byzantina*  
(lamb's ears)
- J *Thymus* (thyme)



# CHIVES

*Allium schoenoprasum*



Zones: 3–9

Type: Perennial

Light: Full sun or part shade

Size: 1 ft. tall, 1 ft. wide

Interest: Pink to light purple pompon-like flowers crowning a clump of narrow, hollow leaves

Uses: Culinary, decorative, medicinal

This tough, clump-forming perennial looks pretty near the front of a flower border, where you can snip leaves and flowers as needed for salads and cooking. The 10-inch-long, dark green, onion-scented leaves are hollow and add zest to many dishes. Chives belong to the same family as onions, but they produce many little bulbils from which emerge the characteristic foliage and erect flower stems. The 1-inch, globe-shaped, lavender flowers are as tasty as they are decorative.

## HOW TO GROW

Chives prefer full sun and a soil that is rich, moist, and well drained, but they are more tolerant of wet, heavy soil and shade than most alliums. The plants are easy to grow and multiply quickly. To renew older clumps, divide every three to four years, keeping a cluster of at