

PERENNIAL HERBS WITH LANDSCAPE POTENTIAL

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The business of herbs is becoming an important part of horticulture. Americans are becoming more health conscious and, in order to enjoy fresh seasonings, many people are growing herbs along with vegetables in their landscapes and gardens.

Herbs, loosely defined, include plants used in medicine, used for flavorings or seasonings, and for fragrances. Some also include plants used for dried flowers, dyes, or fibers. We feel if we were to look closely enough, most plants would have some type of herbal use. Herbs can be annual, perennial, woody, or herbaceous.

Following are descriptions of some perennial herbs that might be used in the landscape.

Santolina chamaecyparissus—lavender cotton A low-growing shrub that makes an attractive border—it may reach a height of 2 ft. Its silver color makes it a nice contrast plant. It grows best in a dry, sunny location and does not do well in humid areas. The branches of santolina can be hung in closets to repel moths. There are also green-foliaged types.

Verbascum thapsus—mullein. A medicinal gray-leaved accent herb that has a tall bloom spike arising out of the center of the plant. Although this plant is considered a biennial, the plants reseed and seedlings will be back every year.

Rosmarinus officinalis—rosemary. Rosemary is a favorite in many herb gardens. It is also an important cooking herb and may have medicinal properties. Rosemary has two growth forms, upright and prostrate. Upright rosemary can have shrublike growth and reach a height of 3 to 5 ft. Prostrate forms have more of a spreading habit and may reach heights of 2 to 3 ft. depending on cultivar. Rosemary may be marginally hardy in some areas, but some cultivars have shown hardiness to Washington, D.C.

Stachys byzantina—lamb's ears. This soft-leaved plant may be used as an accent or border. When blooming, the plants may reach 18 in. Lamb's ear leaves are medicinal, said to act as a styptic in stopping the blood flow of minor cuts and nicks.

Myrtus communis—myrtle. Small-leaved shrub that can be used as a short hedge or border. It can also be trimmed into shapes or designs. The leaves and flowers are used in potpourri.

Tanacetum vulgare—tansy. Attractive, spreading perennial that may reach 3 to 4 ft. Tansy spreads by rhizomes but is not invasive. Tansy was once thought to have insect-repelling properties. The flowers may be used to produce a yellow dye.

Artemisia species. There are many ornamental artemesias that are grown for fragrances.

A. 'Powys Castle' is a good border or edging plant with nice lacy foliage and compact growth habit.

A. ludoviciana var. *albula*, silver king or ghost plant, grows to about 2 ft with a spreading habit. It is used in dried bouquets and arrangements.

A. absinthium, wormwood, grows to 3 ft in poor soil. Plants are decorative in the back border of the garden. It may be used as a moth repellent.

Lavandula species—lavender. There are many lavender spp. and cultivars. Most do not do well in the humid areas, but are very popular throughout the rest of the country. The flowers are used for sachets and potpourri. Lavender is also commercially distilled for its oil. Heights range from 1 to 3 ft.

Mentha species—mint. Mint is a good ground cover growing to about 1 ft tall. There are many flavors of mint, but the most popular ones are peppermint and spearmint. Trim mints back often to keep them full.

Salvia species—sage. This is a very important genus including about 800 species. The most important is *Salvia officinalis*, or what we call gray sage. This species is used as a seasoning. There are some cultivars of *S. officinalis* that may have landscape potential. Purple sage, *S. officinalis* 'Purpurascens', golden sage, *S. officinalis* 'Aurea', and 'Tricolor' sage may be slightly hardier than *S. officinalis*. All have a good flavor and can be used as seasonings.

Other salvias are primarily ornamental, but some may be used for potpourris. *Salvia farinacea*, or mealy blue sage, grows to 3 ft. Colors include blue and white.

Thymus species—thyme. Thymes fall into three broad groups: upright sub-shrubs 12 to 18 in. tall, creeping herbs up to 6 in. tall, and flat creepers that grow 1 to 2 in. tall. All of these can be used in cooking, but the creeping types are very tedious to harvest.

Variegated lemon thyme has a lemony odor and flavor. It makes a nice 6-in. ground cover. There are many other thymes that are effective in the landscape.

Viola odorata—violet. Violets are good ground covers for shady or semisunny areas growing to about 12-in. mounds. The oil of violets is used in perfume.

Poterium sanguisorba—burnet. This is an evergreen mounding herb that reaches 12 in. in height. The new leaves from burnet add a cucumber flavor to salads.

Agastache foeniculum—anise hyssop. Upright-growing plant that may reach 3 ft. Dried leaves are used for seasoning in teas and are used in potpourri.

Helichrysum angustifolium—curry plant. Curry plant is hardy to about 10° F and has the fragrance of curry. It is not, however, what curry powder is made of. Curry is an upright grower and may be 2 to 3 ft. tall.

Hyssopus officinalis—hyssop. Hyssop is an evergreen reaching 2 ft when flowering. May be clipped to 8 or 12 in. It can be used as a specimen or small hedge plant. Hyssop leaves and flowers add a bitter taste to salads and meats.

Marrubium vulgare—horehound. Horehound is an herb that reaches 3 ft. and has lovely gray-green foliage. It is used in traditional medicine and in making candy.

Teucrium chamaedrys—germander. This is a dwarf, upright shrub with small, waxy leaves. It grows easily and requires minimal care. It can be used as a small border or hedge. Germander was once thought to be a cure for gout but is now known to have no medicinal use.

Leonotis leonurus—lion's ear. Lion's ear is an upright-growing, root-hardy perennial. It has striking orange flowers and may reach 3 ft. in height. Its flowers may be used dried in arrangements.

Asclepias tuberosa—pleurisy root. This is a root-hardy perennial that grows 1 to 2 ft. tall. It is mainly grown for its striking orange flowers. It is also known as butterfly weed because butterflies are attracted to it. Pleurisy root was once thought to be medicinal, but now it is known that it has no medicinal properties.

Mentha pulegium—pennyroyal. Pennyroyal is a low-creeping ground cover, rarely getting over one inch tall. It is used in teas and medicines.

Melissa officinalis—lemon balm. Lemon balm is a hardy perennial growing 18 in. tall. It has an excellent lemon flavor that can be used in tea and salads.

Satureja montana—winter savory. Winter savory is a spreading, low-growing evergreen sub-shrub that may reach 12 in. tall. It is used as a vegetable seasoning.

Allium species—chives, and garlic chives. There are several onion relatives that can be used as borders or accent plants. *Allium schoenoprasum*, chives, may reach 12 to 18 in. in height. *Allium tuberosum*, garlic chives, grows a little larger and has flatter leaves than common chives. *Tulbaghia violacea*, society garlic, may reach 2 ft. in height. It has attractive lavender flowers.