

Add Spice to Your Garden with Herbs

No my friends! We are not about to speak on the herb they are fighting to legalize. It is often said that variety is the spice of life; in the same light, herbs will add variety of life to your vegetable garden and landscape. There are records to prove that in recent years more people are diagnosed with high blood pressure and diabetes. As a result, doctors are recommending that patients reduce their consumption of sugar and salt. Alongside this recommendation is the advice that patients should substitute natural herbs and spices for salt.

In the past decade we have seen more herbs in gardens and the landscapes. What is exciting to me is that herbs are very versatile. Many herbs are very attractive around the border of perennial beds, pots of herbs can add elegance to the patio, they can grow in window boxes and hanging baskets. Herbs are very eye captivating in pots and can be placed in areas where gardens are not possible. For instance, herb pots can be place along the drive way and on impervious structure where tilling is not possible. One common mistake I have noticed among gardeners is that they do not always remember to bore holes in the bottom of the container to facilitate drainage. It is also important to note that herbs will grow anywhere there is light, moisture and average soil fertility. There is one outstanding characteristic I like about herbs, is that each time you harvest, the more they grow; harvesting is like pruning. Herbs are easy to propagate, each clipping is potentially a new plant; lack of water is the main factor that will stop cuttings from growing. It is of utmost importance that the plant is watered immediately after planting. After herbs get started, let the soil dry slightly between watering; most herbs require moderate amount of water to grow well. In addition, be mindful that overwatering can cause herbs to have root rot disease.

Adding mulch to your herb garden is very beneficial. Mulch suppresses weeds and conserves moisture. Our experience has taught us that herbs can be planted in-ground and in containers. However, the disadvantage of the container garden is that plants in containers require frequent watering.

Good soil preparation and draining are very important for establishing and maintaining good plant health. Herbs that are planted in ground, once established they are self-maintaining; they do not require much care such as weed control and watering. Most herbs have the advantage of having only a few insect pests' problems due to their usual strong taste. They are also not favored by many diseases. It is also worthy to mention that herbs serve as good companion plants that repel insects from vegetable gardens. For example, basil repels hornworm while garlic repels the Japanese beetle. The following are few from the long list of herbs that are great for Central Florida; basil, chives, oregano, dill, lavender, and parsley. There are wide varieties of herbs that are available at the local garden store. On the last note, do not forget to ask your neighbors, family and friend for plant cuttings; it does not take much for them to grow.

For more information on herbs and other related topics, you may contact Grantly Ricketts at 321-697-3014 or email gricketts@ufl.edu.