



## Bring Those Herbs Indoors

By Carol Quish, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

As the colder weather puts an end to outside growing, many of the herb plants can be brought indoors for more months of growing. It is good for our mood to have green, growing plants in our living environments. Herbs will add a bright spot on the windowsill and their scent to air after a gentle stroking of the leaves will release the odorous oils.

Annual herbs in Connecticut include dill, basil, cilantro, rosemary. Parsley is technically a biennial living two years, but it will die if we have very cold winter so treat it as an annual by digging up the entire plant to pot up and bring inside. Perennial herbs that live many years outside in our zone include mint, thyme, oregano, sage and lavender. Lavender and sage are more woody plants that grow fairly large and will need a good-sized pot and adequate space if growing indoors. Most others will do well in smaller containers fitting on a tabletop in front of a sunny window or light source. Divide the perennial, non-woody herbs by digging up only a portion of the plant and roots for potting, leaving the rest of the plant to grow outdoors to produce next year.

Before bringing the plants indoors, clean any dead leaves or roots and check for insects. Wash them with hose gently to dislodge any eggs or hidden invaders that could cause a problem later. Apply a preventative coating of insecticidal soap as a precaution. Cut back the tops by half, then pot them up in a container with holes in the bottom and use a well-draining potting mix. Most herbs like a lean soil without added fertilizer. Do not fertilize until spring when a flush of new growth begins.

Place the herbs in a south or east window to provide the brightest light or use a grow light, keeping the light six inches above the plants. The light and humidity change will be a shock to the plants until they adjust to their new surroundings. Keep plants out of hot rooms, away from radiators and drafts and in cooler room between 60 and 70 degrees F. Water sparingly, once per week, until water drains out of the bottom. Remove all water from saucer below pot and never let the pot sit in water as this leads to root rot. Mist leaves with clear water occasionally to increase humidity as heated homes have dry air.

Winter is the normal rest period for herbs with much reduced growth. Do not expect the same level of harvest you were getting in July. In February, when days begin to lengthen, the plants will respond with new growth. This is the time for diluted liquid feeding with a seaweed or fish emulsion fertilizer. If you notice the plants are getting a bit drier, increase the number of waterings to twice per week.

Rosemary topiaries are a commonly sold for indoor use; however, they are notoriously hard to grow in homes without developing powdery mildew. They are pretty for a while, then will harbor white, fuzzy growth on the needles. It is best to enjoy them while you can, then at the first white speck of disease, harvest all the needles, dry them and store in a jar in your spice cabinet.

Dill seeds scattered on fresh potting soil in a pretty pot will result in new, feathery plants without the trouble of digging up larger garden grown plants. Try seeding cilantro and basil in containers, too. Soon a green little oasis will be emerging to get us through the winter and provide a light snipping of leaves to enhance a meal without harming the plant but bringing back summer's memories to our taste buds through a winter's meal.

If you have questions about herbs or queries on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

