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## Herbs spice up our lives

**By Grace C. Lockwood**  
 Herbs have been part of mankind's earliest gardens. They provided flavor to foods and more importantly, were used as medicines for various ailments ranging from overindulgences to cancer, and salves for injuries.

Some of the earliest books were herbals listing thousands of plants and their medicinal and/or toxic properties. Some of the more famous infamous plants are foxglove, the source of digitalin, a heart drug; feverfew for migraines; and hemlock, a deadly poison.

Interestingly enough, although intricate herb gardens were cultivated in monasteries for centuries, herbs and herbal medicines were

associated with women. Physicians used more exotic remedies like leeches, blood letting and mercury. Women's knowledge of the mysterious, powerful effects of herbs led in part to the belief of witches and the tragic deaths of thousands of women.

Today, the medicinal and drug inducing powers of herbs are left to skilled herbalists while we are more familiar with culinary herbs for the kitchen. Fresh herbs add subtle to bold flavors and textures to food not found with the dried stuff on grocery shelves. Everyone should have at least a few in their garden for summer cooking and to store for winter. Generally, herbs like a sunny position and soil a little on

the sparse side. Plants like mint will be absolutely rampant in rich soil while others will sulk. Traditional herb gardens were in the form of intricate knot gardens outlined in boxwood and the plants growing in between the patterns. The hardier forms of boxwood can be used our area as an edging and will make the garden appealing in the winter as well.

The following is just a brief description of culinary herbs that are readily available. Annual herbs include members of the umbrellifera family: parsley, dill, fennel, anise, chervil, cumin and caraway, among others. They are wonderful in salads, soups, sauces and the seeds of caraway, anise and cumin in baking. Fennel is paired with fish and the bulbous root can be cooked as a vegetable accompaniment with a delicate licorice flavor.

Basil is well known as a partner to tomatoes and as wonderful garlicky pesto. There are many varieties of basil but for pesto and general use, the large leaf sweet basil is the best as it is easier to harvest than the smaller leafed types. Basil is a very tender herb, shriveling at the thought of frost and should be started indoors in early May if spring lags a bit. The rest can be seeded outside when the soil is warm. Parsley and dill can be planted in early spring to let light frosts bring the seeds out of dormancy. Summer savory has a nicer flavor than the perennial winter savory and is perfect with fresh green beans. Coriander or cilantro is indispensable in Mexican and Indian cooking and its spicy leaves will add a spark to everything.

The perennial herbs should be placed with care in your garden as they will be with you for many years and some grow quite large or spread rapidly. Lovage is a five foot giant for the back of the garden. It is known as the soup pot herb and forms the base for the Dutch seasoning "Maggi". Sage is a woody two foot plant. It used to be a cure-all herb, increasing longevity and sage of course means wise. It is a perfect seasoning for poultry. French tarragon, a sharp tasting herb, is used for the gourmet tarragon vinegar and tarragon flavored butter for carrots. Be sure you buy true French tarragon and not the flavorless Russian type (which is the only one you can grow from seed). Oregano and rosemary are mediterranean herbs used in Italian and Greek cooking. Oregano and tarragon will survive outdoors with a good cover mulch but rosemary has to be brought in before the first frost. Rosemary has a strong, almost perfume-like flavor but, accompanied by garlic, it is well-suited to stronger meats such as lamb. Thyme now comes in a whole range of varieties from the common cooking thyme to lemon thyme to nutmeg thyme and the purely ornamental silver-leaved woolly thyme.

A good introduction to herbs is "The Harrowsmith Illustrated Guide to Herbs" by Patrick Lima. An excellent source for both seeds and plants is Richters, Goodwood, ON., Tel: (416) 640-6641.

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<b>Tuesday</b>	5:30 Religion 6:00 Optimists TV Bingo 7:00 Halton Hills Council (Feb. 15/93)	<b>Friday</b>	5:30 Community Calendar 6:00 Sportszone 6:30 Region Council (Feb. 17/93)
<b>Wednesday</b>	5:30 Hospital Waste Incineration in South Carolina 6:30 Community Calendar 7:00 Halton Seniors TV 8:00 Business 231 8:30 Economics 101 9:00 Sociology 323	<b>Check Schedule daily on Cable 4</b>	

TBA = To Be Announced (recently recorded programming)  
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