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GOOD SUMMER HERBS FOR THE HOUSTON-AREA REGION

by Jeanie Dunnihoo

*Harris County Master Gardener and
Herb Society of America South Texas Unit member*

Summer is a great time to dot your landscape with herbs. Our warm tropical climate enables us to plant herbs like basil, garlic chives, oregano, rosemary, several types of mints, lemon herbs and even some large tropical herbs like Hoja santa, also known as the root beer plant and our famous "Texas tarragon" Mexican mint marigold.

Most of these herbs have multiple uses:

* Good to eat or for brewing refreshing teas

* Provide shelter for native reptiles

* attract beneficial insects to protect other plants

* BASILS: Now that temperatures are above 60 at night, all basil do well. Italian favorites, Genovese green and sweet green basil, are often called regular basil. Purple ruffles or dark opal basil and Thai basil Siam Queen offer spots of color in sunny beds. All add a spicy note to food and especially homemade vinegars.

Clip these culinary beauties regularly to prevent flowering (causes early death). I plant several groups of all basil, leaving some for bees to enjoy.

* GARLIC CHIVES (*Allium tuberosum*) add a mild taste of garlic to dishes and provide pretty star shaped flowers for bees all summer.

* OREGANO. The three I like most are Hill Hardy (*Origanum x marjoricum*), Greek Oregano, and the Mexican plant (*Poliomintha longiflora*) which is not a true oregano but is often used interchangeably. This "Mexican" oregano's purple flowers attract bees and other beneficials.

* ROSEMARY. My favorites are Gorizia, Spice Island , Tuscan blue and Arp. These upright plants have a less piney taste but all rosemaries are edible. For a twisted prostrate type, Huntington Blue is pretty. Give rosemary water but rapid drainage. Avoid watering rosemary from overhead with the lawn sprinkler.

* MINTS are at their peak in early summer then usually bloom in July. Blooms are a favorite of bees. But if you choose to harvest mint for drying it has the best flavor just before blooming. Frequent trimming and water

101 Sherbrook Circle • Conroe, Texas 77385-7750
(936) 321-6990 Metro • (936) 273-1200 Conroe • Fax (936) 273-1655


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keeps mint happy. Mint will want to take over a garden. Best to grow it in very large round pots to keep different varieties separated. Favorite mints include red stem apple mint (*Mentha x gracilis*) which contains both peppermint and spearmint oils, spearmint (*Mentha.spicata*) and peppermint (*menthe.piperita*).

* LEMON HERBS. Lemon grass (*Cymbopogon citratus*), lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), and the "queen" of lemon scents, lemon verbena (*Aloysia triphylla*) all grow well in our hot summer. Give lemon balm some shade for better flavor.

* MEXICAN MINT MARIGOLD (*Tagetes lucida*) is grown for it's sweet yellow flowers that the bees love and it's similar taste to tarragon.

Give herbs good soil and adequate drainage and they will reward you with their special qualities!

Contact Jeanie Dunnihoo at rlowicki@comcast.net



Great for our summers, l to r: 'Tuscan Blue' rosemary, Mexican mint marigold and spearmint

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LAZY GARDENING P.S.: Mexican mint marigold is great for beds dogs like to invade. It can stand extreme pruning (translation: stomped to ground) and emits a wonderful fragrance when lightly pruned (translation: dog breaks off branches).

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