

LANDSCAPING WITH HERBS

by Karen Michaud

With the resurgence of interest in herbs for culinary and medicinal uses, homeowners are interested in growing these fascinating plants in their own gardens. Herbs have the versatility to be a plant to flavour soup or to become a soft, grey-leaved addition to provide interest in the landscape.

Historically, herbs have been used in kitchen gardens and complex knot gardens and have been separated from the rest of the garden. With their myriad of colours, textures and scents, they can transform the atmosphere of residential and public spaces into significant areas of interest.

What exactly is a herb? The dictionary defines a herb as a plant with a succulent stem that dies down each year, especially those used for medicines and flavouring. The Herb Society of America defines a herb as a plant "for use and for delight". We can categorize herbs into smaller groups such as: culinary plants (Dill and Sage), tea plants (Lemon balm and colourful Bergamot), scented plants for potpourri (Lavender and old Roses), silver leaved herbs (Artemisia and Lamb's Ears) plus all the herbs that are used medicinally including Foxgloves and the popular Echinacea. Herbs are becoming more available and many plants that are not always recognized as herbs have been in our gardens for years.

My own display Herb Garden is filled with well over two hundred types of herbs for fragrance, flavour, texture and their ability to attract butterflies. The plants range in size from tiny-leaved ground covers to colourful perennials that spill out onto the pathways to large shrubs and even trees.

Good landscapers know their plant material, so become familiar with these wonderful plants and include them in garden design.

GROUND COVERS: There is enough variety among these herbal ground covers to provide splashes of colour and interesting textures throughout the garden. The low growing Thymes fill in nicely around stone pathways. Mother of thyme (*Thymus praecox*) and Purple creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*) are best in full sun and will climb over small stones and give off a pungent odour when leaves are crushed underfoot. Cunningham mint (*Mentha pulegium* sp.) will form a large mat that will take light foot traffic. Sweet Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) and Sweet violets (*Viola odorata*) thrive in shade under tall trees. Moneywort (*Lysimachia nummularia*) and Dead nettle (*Lamium maculatum*) are not good choices as they are invasive in Coastal British Columbia!

EDGING AND HEDGING: Edging plants soften hard lines and are at their best spilling out onto walkways and framing entrances. Some of the best are Lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) with rounded leaves and chartreuse flowers, Garden thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) and Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), which provide fragrance when brushed.

Small hedges are useful to define or mark boundaries. Hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*), Winter savory (*Satureja montana*) and the more common Santolina Sage (*Santolina chamaecypariss*) make small neat hedges and are often used in knot gardens. These plants will stand clipping, but once a season is usually enough to keep them tight.

COLOURFUL BORDERS: Herbs are so much more than green plants. With the variety of flowers and season of bloom herbs will add colour and fragrance throughout the growing season. Be sure to plant your culinary herbs close to your kitchen for ease of gathering.

Spring: The fresh flowers of *Viola odorata*, *Galium odoratum*, *Myrrhis odorata* (Sweet cicely), and *Primula veris* (Cowslip) bring life back to the garden after the winter. These plants mix well with spring bulbs.

Early Summer: Feverfew (*Chrysanthemum parthenium*), *Alchemilla mollis*, Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), Showy catmint (*Nepeta mussini*).

Mid summer: Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*, *Achillea filipendula*), Bergamot (*Monarda didyma*, *Monarda fistulosa*), Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*), Milkweed (*Asclepias sp.*), Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*).

Late summer to fall: Fennel giant hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*), Great lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*), tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), Elecampane (*Inula helenium*), Ghost wormwood (*Artemisia lactiflora*).

EDIBLE FLOWERS: Many easy to grow annuals produce colourful edible flowers. Borage (*Borago officinalis*), Calendula or pot marigold (*Calendula officinalis*) and Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) are best grown by direct seeding.

VINES: Hops (*Humulus lupulus*), Trumpet Vine (*Campsis radicans*), Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) are all vigorous herbal vines. They produce interest throughout the growing season. Stand back when Hops vines are growing. They grow over anything in their path.

FOLIAGE: Herbs have very interesting foliage colours and textures.

Silver or Grey: Artemisia Silver Queen or King (*Artemisia ludoviciana* var. *albula*), Lavandula, Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) and Lamb's Ears (*Stachys byzantina*).

Grey-Green: Southernwood (*Artemisia Abrotanum*, *Artemisia camphotata*, *Artemisia. procera*), Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) and *Nepeta X fassenil*.

Blue-Green: Rue (*Ruta graveolens*), Chives and Garlic (*Allium sp.*). Rue can cause skin reactions so keep it away from pathways. Dark green curly Parsley adds interest to plantings.

Fern-like: Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) and Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*). A red, purple or bronze Fennel is also available.

Coloured: Purple Basil (*Ocimum 'Opal'* or *'Red Rubin'*) dark purple Perilla (*Perilla frutescens 'Atropurprua'*) Purple Sage (*Salvia officinalis 'Purpurascens'*), Gold sage (*Salvia officinalis 'Icterine'*) and Tricolour Sage (*Salvia officinalis 'Tricolor'*)

SHRUBS: Many shrubs can be included in a herbal landscape. Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), Boxwood (*Buxus sp.*), Carolina allspice (*Calycanthus floridus*), Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), Mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius*), and Rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*).

TREES: Trees with medicinal or economical use can also be considered herbs. Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), Sweet birch (*Betula lenta*), Quince (*Cydonia sinesis*), Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*), and Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*)

References:

Gardner, Jo Ann. Herbs in Bloom. Timber Press, Oregon, 1998

Kirkpatrick, Debra. Using Herbs in the Landscape. Stackpole books, Harrisburg, 1992

BIO NOTES: Karen is a graduate of the N.S.A.C., a graduate of the Niagara Parks Commission School of Horticulture. She runs a business called Country Lane Herbs that is located in Puslinch, Ontario. She offers tours of her herb garden, herbal workshops, and sells potted herbs, dried herbs, and potpourri supplies. Karen Michaud may be contacted at: Country Lane Herbs, R.R 3, Puslinch, Ontario N0B 2J

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