

# Winter Herbs

By Peggy Hill

Last year was the snowiest Alabama winter I have ever experienced. After almost a week, I was tired of waiting for the big melt-down. I walked out to my vegetable garden, brushed off the snow and harvested one of my favorite herbs. Pound per pound this super food has more vitamin C than Florida oranges, over twice as much iron as raw spinach, and more potassium than sliced bananas. Don't worry yourself with needless speculation; I'm talking about parsley.

I've grown parsley for many years and it's one of my favorites. It's a biennial. That means if you plant it in spring, you can enjoy it all summer, fall, winter and the next spring. Then it sets seed and dies. You can extend its life if you keep cutting back the flower stalk, but I always let at least one plant do what it wants. The flower is a great nectar source for beneficial insects. When it's finished flowering, leave the flower stalk until the seeds ripen and fall off. Soon you will have so many seedlings; you'll need to thin them. You can share the extras with friends or plant them in other areas of the garden.

Plant more parsley than you need because, if you are lucky, the caterpillars of the swallowtail butterfly will eat much of it. Please share with them. If you plant in several different areas of your garden, chances are good the caterpillars won't find it all. Besides, often the damage is not fatal, and the plants recover. Harvest the older, outer leaves and let the others mature or cut off the whole plant at the ground.

Parsley is not the only herb you can harvest year-round. Rosemary, thyme and oregano are all long-lived evergreen perennials. There are many varieties of rosemary to choose from. Some remain fairly small and some can become large shrubs. Thyme and oregano are short spreading plants that can be used as a ground cover.

Given good drainage and at least a half-day of sun, herbs are easy to grow. They are also easy to grow in a pot. You can grow annual herbs such as basil inside over the winter, but they need a lot of sun and do best under a grow light.

Herbs lose flavor if you let them bloom, so harvest regularly. They also lose some flavor when cooked and are usually added just before serving. Fresh herbs have a lot of water in them, so if your recipe calls for dried herbs, use three times the amount.

For a small investment and a little time spent planting this spring, you too can harvest the rewards of growing herbs for years to come.

Peggy Hill writes about gardening shenanigans at [www.hiddenhills-garden.com/blog](http://www.hiddenhills-garden.com/blog)

Photos Top to Bottom: Basil, Sage, Rosemary, Parsley, and Leeks.

