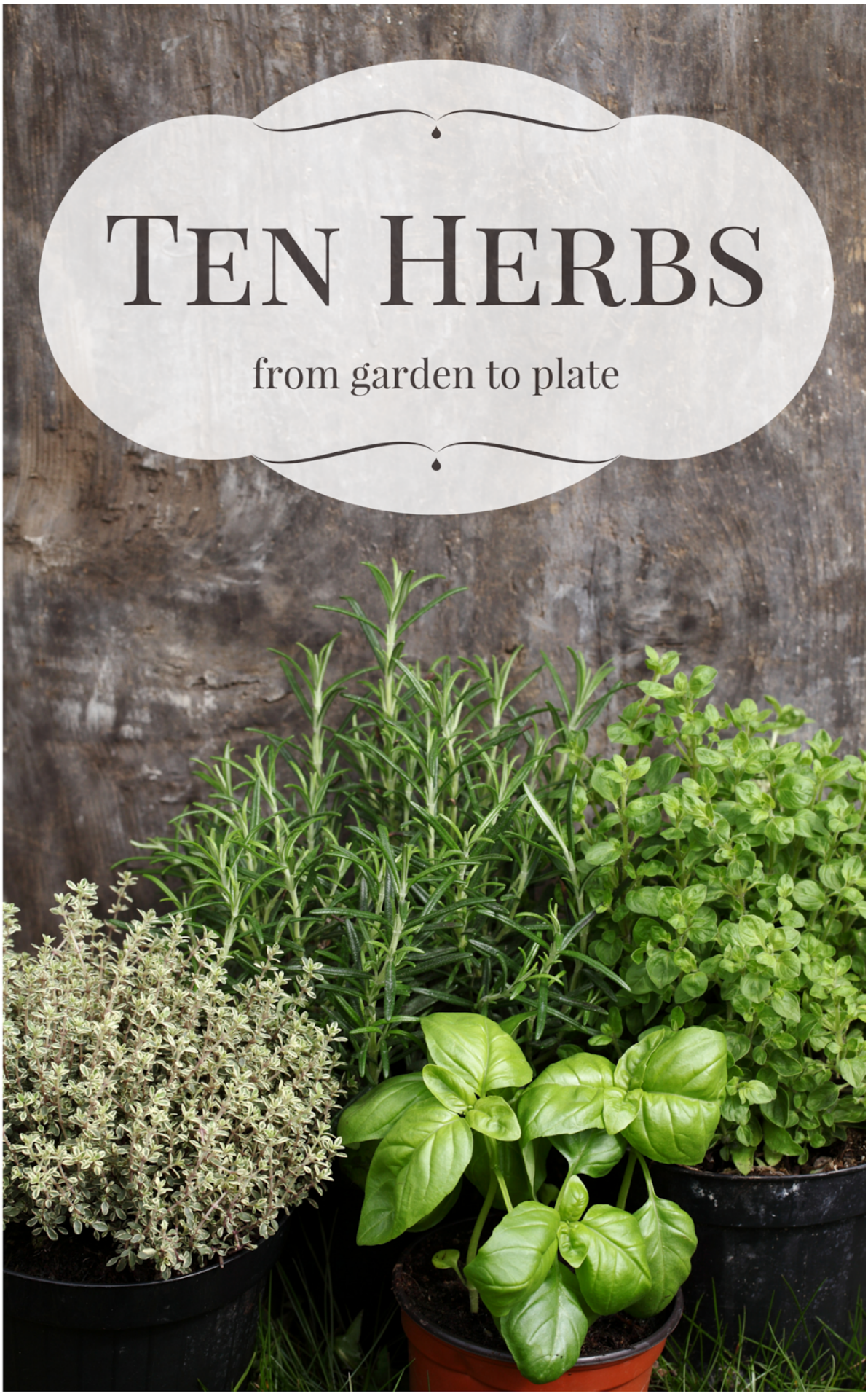
Ten Herbs
from garden to plate

Introduction

Herbs are such amazing plants. They have been used for thousands of years to flavor food, add fragrance to our environment, repel bugs in the garden and heal bodies. They are also pretty easy to grow so no home should be without freshly grown herbs.

In this book you'll find growing tips and recipes to use some of our favorite herbs. We've intentionally kept this book short and sweet so as to not overwhelm you with lots of herbal possibilities. This is a "getting started" type book. The more you learn about herbs the more it will seem you have to learn, it's a lifelong process.

And just who are "we"? We are five friends who have a passion for helping people live a more natural, simple lifestyle. We're all at different stages of learning about herbs and of using herbs. So, instead of a book that has multiple authors but reads like just one person wrote it, in this book you'll see five different authors.

Each one of us writes a blog and these few herb profiles and recipes are just a sampling of what we each have on our blogs. Although all of us write about living a simpler, more natural lifestyle, we all have different ways of going about this; because there isn't just one way to live a simple lifestyle.

Kathie of Homespun Seasonal Living develops and shares many simple but delicious recipes (most of the time using food she has grown). She also writes about gardening, living a fiercely DIY lifestyle and embracing seasonal living.

Chris of Joybilee Farm writes quite a lot about herbs with a focus on using them medicinally. She is a wealth of herbal information. She also shares real food recipes and cooking tips (like these Grandma tips for baking cookies).

Tessa of Homestead Lady has a passion for preparedness and writes about homesteading, cooking from scratch (especially fermented foods and gluten free) and, of course, gardening.

Jess of The 104 Homestead writes about urban homesteading. She has wonderful articles on chickens, quail, goats, rabbits {whew} and gardening. She also manages to squeeze in real food recipes in her post line up.

Angi of SchneiderPeeps has a passion to help people live a simpler life. She writes about gardening (and keeps it real by showing the pretty and the not so pretty photos in her monthly garden updates) and shares simple but delicious recipes and DIY projects that even a small child can do.

We hope this ebook will help you live a richer, more simple life. Please feel free to visit each of our blogs, we'd love to help you along on your journey.

Basil - *Ocimum basilicum*

Basil is an easy to grow, tender annual. It loves the heat. Grow it with your hot peppers and tomatoes. What keeps them happy will keep your basil happy.

How to plant

You can get basil plants from most nurseries but they are easy to start from seed. Starting from seed gives you access to many different varieties of basil with different flavor profiles. Looking for basil seeds in most seed catalogs, you'll find Genovese basil, used in Mediterranean cooking, cinnamon basil, lemon basil, and purple basil types. Holy Basil, or Tulsi, is medicinal basil used for tea, which tastes quite differently than culinary basil.

Basil prefers rich, loose, well-drained soil, with lots of sun.

Plant the seeds, ½ inch deep, in seedling pots, 8 weeks before your last frost date. Sprinkle cinnamon on the soil surface to inhibit the fungus that causes damping off disease.
Basil germinates at 70°F. Use a heat mat if your germination area is cooler. Once the first true leaves emerge repot in 2 inch pots.

Provide supplemental lighting to get stalky plants. Transplant outdoors when the soil has warmed up and all danger of frost has passed. Transplant Basil 12 inches apart, in full sun. Insure adequate soil moisture by watering weekly, and using mulch. Basil also grows well in containers.

When the plants are 6 inches tall, pinch off the growing tips to encourage more foliage. During the growing season, if you see the flower buds beginning to form, pinch these off as well to encourage more leafy growth.

Enemies of the plant

Damping off disease can be prevented by using cinnamon on the soil surface at planting time.

Spider mites, aphids, thrips, and whitefly can be problems in the greenhouse - use DE to interrupt their life cycle.

Basil is susceptible to several bacterial and fungal diseases. Full sunlight and good airflow will keep the plants healthy.

Companions

Basil grows well with peppers, tomatoes, and eggplant. Oregano also grows well with basil.

How and when to harvest

Basil leaves have the most flavour just before the plant flowers. If you plan to make a big batch of pesto, or preserve your basil for winter, this is the best time to harvest it.

You can harvest up to ½ the plant at one time, without damaging the plant. To harvest, pinch off branches just under the top 4 to 6 leaves on the growing tip.

You can take more of the branch provided you leave 2 leaves on the stem below where you pinch it. These will regrow with fresh, leafy stems.

12 basil plants will give a family 4 cups of leaves each week during the growing season.

How to propagate

Save your own basil seed by letting two plants flower. The flowers will dry right on the plant. If your plant is pollinated by bees, your seed will be viable.

Remove the almost dry flowers and place in a paper bag or paper envelope. Put the paper sack in a warm, dry, well-ventilated place. The flowers will dry and mature the seeds. Save the dried seeds for next year's basil crop.

How to preserve

Basil gets its distinctive flavor from the volatile oils in the leaves. When you are working with the leaves, tear them rather than cutting them with a knife. This preserves the oils within the leaves, rather than allowing them to escape during processing.

When cooking with fresh basil, add the basil just before you serve the dish. When heated, the minty aromatic flavours come to the forefront rather than the complex of flavours you identify with basil.

Basil doesn't retain its strong flavour when dried. To preserve more of the basil flavour, preserve the herb in oil or vinegar. Make pesto and freeze it in serving size portions.

Basil can also be preserved in ice. To do this, tear the basil in strips and preserve in ice cubes. Remove from the ice cube tray and store in containers or Ziploc bags in your freezer. This will keep the fresh basil flavour for up to 4 months. Drop the ice cube in your cooking just before serving to give your dish a splash of fresh basil taste.

~Chris of Joybilee Farm

Basil Finishing Salt

When the basil is fresh in your garden, harvest a large colander full to make finishing salts. Finishing salts can be used any place you'd use table salt. Add it to salad dressing, sauces, meat, and vegetables. It is easy to make in a food processor. When you have made enough pesto for the season and you've got more basil coming, a batch of finishing salt is another way to preserve the harvest.

Ingredients:

3 cups Basil leaves, or a combination of fresh herbs
1 cup Coarse Celtic sea salt or Himalayan salt
2 tbsp. Whole pepper corns

Method:
Wash basil leaves. Blot dry with a paper towel. Tear leaves into small pieces, discarding stems.

In the bowl of a food processor, add torn basil leaves, coarse salt, and pepper. Process on medium speed until basil is fully chopped and the salt is a finer grind and well mixed with the herbs.

You can leave this as a salt-paste and keep refrigerated. It will last 6 months. The flavour will be strong. This is the way I prefer to preserve it.

Alternatively you can dry it and keep it at room temperature.

To dry the finishing salt:
Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Spread out the salt mixture in a single layer. Place in a warm, airy place, away from direct sunlight to dry completely. Alternatively, place in an oven that has the light bulb turned on, but no heat. Do not cook. Stir occasionally during the drying time.

When the finishing salt is fully dry, package in an airtight jar. May be kept at room temperature if fully dry. The flavour is less intense than the fresh product.

Horseradish - *Armoracia rusticana*

This unique herb made the difficult journey from being primarily a medicinal herb to becoming a culinary delight. You can thank the sixteenth century Danes and Germans for developing their grated horseradish-root fish sauce. It later traveled to Britain where horseradish sauce became primarily associated with beef. A curious quirk of horseradish in the kitchen is that its strong oils volatilize easily in heat and is, therefore, typically used fresh or fermented as a dressing. It pairs nicely with cream cheese, mayo, coleslaw, dips and sour cream and vinegar.

The medicinal properties of horseradish are equally varied and useful. The root is used to stimulate digestion and eliminate mucous. It's powerful when added to homemade cough syrups and fire cider. If you inhale fresh horseradish, you can feel it clearing your sinuses immediately, even if it does make your eyes water! A poultice with horseradish can help administer to aching muscles and stiff joints. It can also prove helpful with urinary infections. According to Lesley Bremness's book, *The Complete Book of Herbs*, the leaves can be chopped "finely into dog food to dispel worms and improve body tone." She also suggests boiling the leaves to produce a deep yellow dye.

I adore horseradish and have grown it in several different growing zones and soil types over the years. My favorite thing about this herb is that it grows. It thrives and survives in many climates and isn't afraid of most garden pests. When something grows in such easy abundance, I feel like that's God telling me I should find lots of ways to use and enjoy it. Although, according to Bremness, you should "avoid continuous large doses when pregnant or suffering from kidney problems (page 49)."

How to Plant

You can grow horseradish from seed, if you'd like, by planting it in a well-drained, rich soil in spring and thinning to 12 inches apart. Horseradish is extremely hardy once established. Once the roots are mature, plan to move your patch every three to five years to prevent mosaic virus and overpowering flavor that turns nearly bitter. Some gardeners lift and move their patch each year, but I find that excessive and unnecessary in my garden. Given the vigorous nature of the roots, you never quite get them all out of the soil but don't sweat it.

Horseradish is more typically propagated by division. (See below)

Herb's enemies

In wet climates slugs and snails can be a problem for the leaves. I've never known any bug foolish enough to attack the roots, though be sure to provide decent drainage to prevent rot in truly wet climates. If you notice an abundance of leaf-biting insects on your horseradish leaves, it's possible your soil is no longer rich enough to keep your plants healthy. Most often, if a plant is struggling with an overload of bad buds, the solution is to be found in strengthening your soil with proper amendments like compost and manure.

Companions

Horseradish has long been used in the potato patch to deter disease and even pesky Colorado potato beetles. (I don't think even nuclear detonation can eradicate those things, but horseradish can help.) It's also useful in the orchard, especially under apple trees, to help combat brown rot and powdery mildew. A decoction can also be made of the root to spray directly on the apples to prevent brown rot.

How and when to harvest

Harvest one to two year old roots as you need them, or in the fall if you're moving your patch. Pick young leaves for salads year round.

How to propagate

Pay attention because this is very involved. Dig up a half-inch thick root. Snap off a few six-inch long pieces. Shove the pieces into the ground at a depth two inches. Cover them up with dirt. Ta da. Once the soil warms in the spring, you'll have sprouting leaves.

How to preserve

To save leaves for future dye projects, simply pick mature leaves and bunch together to hang dry. Be sure to use a chrome mordant to achieve a yellow dye. Store fresh roots in sand or in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator in a zipping-lock plastic bag. You can wash the roots and grate or slice to dehydrate. You can also immerse the whole root into vinegar. When you're ready to use your roots for sauce, follow the instructions in the following recipe.

~Tessa of Homestead Lady

Horseradish Two Ways

To use plain, prepared horseradish in your recipes, you can follow the instructions below. If you want to use the prepared horseradish to make a creamy sauce, follow the next set of instructions.

Plain, Prepared Horseradish

These amounts aren't exact. Just use however much root you'd like to have on hand and enough vinegar to cover your chopped root. This preparation will keep in the fridge for about six weeks and in the freezer for up to eight months.

Ingredients:
1-2 Horseradish roots
Enough vinegar to cover

Method:
Wash and peel the outer skin from your horseradish. You can finely chop or add small pieces to your food processor or blender (with a dash of water). Chop as finely as you can, either way. Try to imagine eating it—as yummy as it is, you don't want to snarf down a quarter-inch piece. I think smoke would come out of your ears.
Horseradish roots have volatile oils that create enzymes when crushed or cut. They're what give horseradish sauce its incredible and tasty bite. The enzymes are neutralized when vinegar is added to the chopped horseradish. So, the heat level of the horseradish preparation can be adjusted to taste, depending on when you add the vinegar. The longer you wait, the hotter the horseradish sauce will be--so be vigilant.

When ready, cover the chopped horseradish in vinegar and then mix a bit more to make sure all of it is completely coated. You can then strain out the vinegar and use it to scour the toilet or activate a lazy compost pile. Store your prepared horseradish in a glass container with a tight fitting lid in the refrigerator or freezer. You can use this chopped horseradish on anything edible to make it taste divine. Or, use it in the cream sauce recipe below.

Creamy Horseradish Sauce

Ingredients:
1 cup Raw, cultured cream* (or pasteurized sour cream)
¼ cup Plain, prepared horseradish
1 tsp. Apple cider vinegar (or favorite vinegar)
½ tsp. Sea salt
¼ tsp. Ground white or black pepper
Pinch of dry mustard
Squeeze of fresh lemon

Method:
Mix all ingredients in a non-reactive bowl. Eat up like a little piggie.

*To make cultured cream pour off a quart of raw cream (cow cream is easiest to use because of the visible cream line). Add 1-2 tablespoons of culture (from yogurt, sour cream, milk kefir or powdered starter culture) and stir in vigorously. Cover and keep in a warm place (75-90 degrees) for at least 24 hours. I usually heat it up a bit in my dehydrator set at 90 degrees for an hour or so. Then I put it in with my homemade yogurt jars to culture in an ice chest, wrapped all together in a blanket.) The cream will thicken more and culture stronger the longer it sits. This is one of the most divine substances you'll ever put in your mouth. I usually make a half gallon at a time because my children eat it so fast.

Hot Peppers - *Capsicum* ssp.

Peppers are short lived perennial plants that are hardy to zone 9. They are usually grown as an annual in zone 8 and under. The fruit is harvested from first year plants. In warmer zones plants can reach a height of 4 to 5 feet and become shrubby. But when grown as an annual they usually remain about 1 ½ to 2 feet high.

Peppers are frost tender and grow best between 65° and 86°F. When temperatures reach into the 90s the flowers fall off, and growth slows. If the nighttime temperatures dip below 50°F, the plants will stall.

Their compact size makes peppers adaptable to containers or transplanting directly into the ground.

Caution

All parts of the hot pepper plant contain capsaicin, the chemical that gives peppers their heat. The hotter the pepper, the more capsaicin in all parts of the plant. Handle with care and do not touch your face, eyes, or lips after touching the plant, its seeds, or its fruit. If you get a burning sensation, rinse immediately in a full-fat dairy product, and then wash with soap and water.

How to grow peppers

Ideally start peppers indoors in pots about 8 to 10 weeks before your last frost date. Transplant them outdoors when all danger of frost has past and nighttime temperatures remain above 50°F.

How to germinate pepper seeds

Peppers can be finicky to germinate. To assure success, soak the seeds before planting.

Place the seeds in a piece of paper towel. Fold the towel into quarters. Spritz the towel with water using a spray bottle till the towel is saturated, but not dripping. Enclose the damp towel in a plastic sandwich bag and place in a warm spot. On top of the fridge is usually warm enough. If you are starting several varieties of peppers, be sure to label the plastic bag so you don't get the varieties mixed up.

After 24 to 48 hours you should see the seeds plump. Plant the soaked seed in a prepared divided cell planting tray, ¼ inch deep. Keep the soil moist but not dripping. Sprinkle cinnamon on the soil surface to inhibit fungus. Pepper seeds can take up to 3 weeks to emerge from the soil.

Once the plants have 2 true leaves, transplant them into individual 2 inch pots. Use an enriched, organic potting mix in your seedling pot.

When all danger of frost has passed and night time temperatures remain above 50C, you are ready to transplant your peppers outdoors. Harden off peppers before transplanting outdoors.

How to plant peppers into the ground

Peppers prefer warm, well-drained soil. Mulch the rows with black plastic to retain soil temperatures in Northern gardens. Add 1 cup of complete organic fertilizer to the planting hole. Transplant pepper plants maintaining the depth of the original pot.
Keep well watered during the growing season.

How to transplant peppers into a container

Peppers don't need a lot of space to grow. Use a pot or window box that is at least 10 inches deep. If you live in a warm climate, that tends to be dry in summer, a larger pot, will need watering less often.

Fill your containers with an enriched potting mix. Add ½ to 1 cup of complete organic fertilizer to each pot. Water peppers well after transplanting.

Keep pepper plants evenly moist during the growing season. Peppers don't like to dry out.

Pruning

The growing tips should be pinched back to make the plant more bushy. This protects the developing fruit from sunscald.

Growing peppers

Peppers grow best between 65° and 89°F. If the blossoms are dropping off your plant, the daytime temperatures are too hot for germination. If your peppers are in containers, try moving them to a shady spot until the day time temperatures moderate. Keep the soil moist but not dripping.

Enemies of the plant

Peppers are susceptible to aphids, spider mites, leaf miners, leaf rollers, thrips, flea beetles, pepper weevils, tomato hornworm, and whitefly. Use diatomaceous earth (DE) on the soil surface to control them. Spray with a strong spray of water to dislodge pests from the leaves. Reapply DE as necessary to control pests. In a heavy infestation, insecticidal soap will smother pests and interrupt their lifecycle. Handpicking of larger pests is recommended.

Peppers are also susceptible to bacteria, viruses, and fungus. Controlling insect vectors can minimize damage. Place peppers where sunlight and wind can dry the leaves naturally and inhibit the spread of fungal spores. If you see signs of mildew on the leaves, spraying the plant with diluted, full fat yoghurt, kefir, or whey can arrest the progression of mildew.

Companions

Herbs to plant near hot peppers include: basil, cilantro, oregano, parsley, and rosemary. Hot peppers like to be planted near cucumbers, eggplant, escarole, tomato, okra, Swiss chard, and squash. Avoid planting hot peppers near beans, cabbage family plants, dill, or fennel.

How and when to harvest

Harvest when the peppers are plump and just beginning to colour. If you wait for the fruit to colour completely there will be more sugar in the fruit, but the plant will produce fewer peppers. Peppers continue to ripen after picking.

Peppers will continue to flower and produce fruit until the night time temperatures dip below 50°F. You can keep them producing by picking the fruit as it begins to turn colour. Remember to wear gloves when picking hot peppers, and don't touch your face. Just picking the fruit can put capsaicin on your hands, and cause a burning sensation.

How to preserve

Peppers can be fermented, pickled, dried, frozen, or pressure canned, however the most common way to preserve peppers is by drying them whole. Simply lay them out on a screen in a warm, well ventilated spot, in the shade. They will dry slowly, conserving their hot oils.

All very hot peppers should be preserved by drying whole. Thicker fleshed peppers, like jalapeño, are best for fermenting, pickling, or freezing.

However you choose to preserve them, observe all the precautions that you used to plant them and tend them in the garden. Wear protective gloves, and goggles and chop them up in a well-ventilated area. Do not process hot peppers in a room with pets or young children. The fumes can cause breathing difficulties

When drying peppers, avoid adding anything else to the dehydrator. If tomatoes are dried along with peppers, the tomatoes will be spicier than you expect them to be. Wash the dehydrator sheets thoroughly after drying hot peppers to avoid contaminating other food with hot pepper oils.

You do not need to blanch peppers before freezing. Chop them finely and freeze them in a single layer on a baking sheet. Once frozen, place them in freezer containers for long term storage. You can use a few at a time, as needed. Peppers will keep for a year if frozen.

~Chris of Joybilee Farm

Fermented Hot Sauce

The heat of the hot sauce is dependent of the heat of the hot peppers used in this recipe. Refer to the Scoville scale to determine the varieties of peppers you prefer to use in this recipe. Note that most of us prefer to use jalapenos and habaneros, leaving the hotter varieties to those with higher liability insurance. Do not try this with Trinidad Scorpion peppers or ghost peppers. They should be handled with much more precaution.

Yield: 1 quart

Ingredients:

2 lbs. Fresh jalapeno or habanero peppers, or combination
2 tbsp. Salt
2 tbsp. Whey
Filtered water to fill jar

Method:

Wearing gloves and eye protection stem and chop hot peppers into cubes. Discard the stem end. Place the cubed peppers and their seeds in a wide mouth 1 quart canning jar. Add 2 tbsp. salt to the jar. Add the whey. Fill up the jar to within 1 inch of the top with filtered water. (Obtain whey by draining plain yoghurt or milk kefir through a colander lined with a fine cloth or several layers of cheesecloth. See here for more information.)

Place a weight into the jar to weigh down the peppers and keep them submerged below the surface of the water. Cap the jar with a fermentation lock or alternatively, loosely cap the jar with a plastic lid so that the vapours can escape. (You'll need to burp the jar a couple times a day if you aren't using a fermentation lock.)

Allow the peppers to ferment in the jar on your kitchen counter, away from light and heat. Burp the jar as necessary to prevent a buildup of gases, if you aren't using a fermentation lock. The jar will be actively bubbling after day 2 or 3 and continue bubbling for several days. This will push the fruit up in the jar. When the fermentation is complete, the peppers will sink in the jar. Remove the weight and the fermentation lock.

In an area with good ventilation, wearing gloves, and eye protection, put the fermented peppers in a blender jar, with their liquid. (Warning: Remove pets and small children from the room. Hot pepper fumes can cause breathing difficulties.) Whirl in the blender until the mixture is fully liquid. Pour into a sterilized canning jar with a one piece lid. Refrigerate.

The hot pepper sauce can be transferred to a serving bottle with a drop reducer lid. Keep refrigerated when not in use. It will keep for 1 year. Use sparingly, by the drop, not by the teaspoon.

Hyssop – *Hyssopus officinalis*

Hyssop (Hyssopus officinalis) is a member of the mint family and you'll want to make room for it in your herb garden this year. Don't worry, although it is related to mint, and it does spread, it spreads at a much slower rate than the mints you might be familiar with. The first year you plant, it will look like a frilly clump, but as it gets older, it will form a nice rounded bush about 2′ tall. I plant it as a landscaping plant, with its violet blue spikes of flowers, because I enjoy its beauty as well as its culinary and medicinal uses. The local pollinators enjoy it as much as I do. Even the hummingbirds stop by to admire it.

Hyssop vs. Anise

There is a lot of confusion surrounding the differences between true hyssop and anise hyssop. Anise hyssop (Agastache foeniculum) and true hyssop flowers appear similar and even taste similar, but they come from different roots. Hyssop comes from Europe. Anise is native to North America and tends to be more drought resistant. The real reason to assure that your hyssop is true hyssop is that true hyssop has medicinal benefits that anise does not.

Medicinal Uses

Hyssop is often times uses as a cough and cold remedy, usually in the form of a tea. It loosens mucus, aids in congestion, and lessens the symptoms colds, flu, sinus infections, and bronchitis.

Culinary Uses

The flavors of hyssop are hard to describe. It's a somewhat bitter, minty-liquorice flavor. It's used to flavor the popular liqueur, Absinthe. The leaves add a nice minty note to marinades (use sparingly) and the flowers are a nice decorative and refreshing element to salads.

Growing Hyssop

Hyssop is very easy to grow. In the northern US and southern Canada, it can be found growing along the side of the road. It's hardy in zone 3-10. It can easily be started from seed indoors, but if you can

find an established plant, you can to divide the root ball to start new clumps. To start collect seeds from an established plant, let the flowers dry and then “paper bag” them in the fall.

Plant your hyssop in full sun with a 18-24″ spacing. If you want a bushier plant, in the spring, prune heavily to encourage new growth.

~Jess of The 104 Homestead

Cough & Congestion Tea

Feel a cold coming on? Try this recipe.

Ingredients:

1 tbsp. Dried hyssop flowers or 3 tbsp. of fresh

8 oz. Water

1 tbsp. Honey

1 tsp. Lemon

Method:

Steep flowers in boiling water in a covered container for ten minutes. Add lemon (optional) and honey. Honey can be adjusted for optimal sweetness.

Lavender - *Lavandula angustifolia*

(other types include *L. officinalis* and *L. stoechas*)

The fresh, clean scent of lavender has been prized through the ages; even by the Romans who used it for bathing. In fact, the name for this fragrant herb comes from the Latin *lavare*, "to wash". Its antiseptic properties make it a useful additive to herbal washes and cosmetics, including homemade sunburn creams. It is also commonly used to soothe anxiety, depression, sleeplessness and lethargy. (Those last two seem juxtaposed, but lavender is indeed useful for both.)

Without doubt this lovely, useful plant is my favorite flowering herb and I plant it everywhere.

How to Plant

If you want to grow lavender from seed, it's necessary to stick with the heirloom varieties like Hidcote and Munstead (visit Horizon Herbs, www.horizonherbs.com, for heirloom herb seed). There are a myriad of lavender crosses, called lavandin, but their seeds are typically sterile. So, using an heirloom seed, dampen your favorite seed starting mix and lay these tiny seeds on the surface of the soil. Cover with a 1/8th of an inch of soil and pat down gently. Water evenly and keep at 70 degrees for best germination. You can follow these same steps in a weed-free area of your garden after the soil has warmed sufficiently. Lavender prefers well drained, sandy soil with a sunny, open site. You can also take cuttings and propagate by layering. See below under *How to Propagate*.

Herb's enemies

Typical of herbs, there are few pests that will bother lavender if their soil is kept from being too wet. In areas with humid summers or winters, spittlebugs, whiteflies and aphids can occasionally be a nuisance. Manually remove pests with a strong water stream or treat with a homemade garlic or cayenne spray.

Companions

Lavender is a pollinator-attracting plant almost without peer among flowering herbs. Plant it alongside any crop or other plant that requires consistent pollination, like an apple tree. Be sure to add in early bloomers to attract pollinators in spring, but lavender will bloom consistently from summer through fall, if you harvest it regularly. Lavender has the added benefit of deterring deer, mice, ticks and rabbits (though, I have yet to meet a deer or rabbit-PROOF plant). The British have been growing lavender and roses together for ages and it's a beautiful relationship of pest-repelling, beneficial insect-attracting gorgeousness.

How and when to harvest

Though the leaves are usable as an additive to potpourris and drawer sachets, it's the lavender flowers that are harvested most often. Cut stems as they come into full flower, usually about midsummer. Harvest throughout the season for continual bloom.
If left to mature on the plant, you can harvest the seeds toward fall by wrapping a muslin bag around a handful of choice flowers to catch the seeds before they fall. You can also wait until flowers are completely mature, harvest, wrap their heads in a bag and invert to dry and fall out into the bag.

How to propagate

Never divide lavender as it will most likely kill the plant. The most reliable form of propagation for lavender is by taking cuttings which will root readily in spring or fall. To take a cutting, snip off a healthy side-shooting branch of medium size. Remove the leaves from the base of the cutting, up the stem about an inch. Using your fingernail, gently scrape away the top layer of woody tissue to the bottom of the stem. Insert into a dampened seed starting mix and place in an area that's at least 70 degrees. Prior to planting, you can dip the stem into a commercial rooting hormone or a water solution that's had willow (any salix variety would do) sitting in it for a few days. You can cover the cutting and pot with a plastic bag, creating a mini-greenhouse environment to reduce stress on the plant. Watch carefully for mold or mildew.

You can also successfully layer lavender. Layering is simple but only works for certain plants, typically those with semi-woody and woody stems. To layer effectively, place a low lying branch on the ground without cutting it off and cover the middle section with dirt. Weigh the soil covered section down with a light rock or plant pins. Check back in a few weeks to a few months and see if the branch has put down roots. Once it has rooted, you can cut the branch off of the mother plant and put it in a prepared pot. I highly suggest getting several good books from the library on the topic of propagation because it will end up saving you lots of money to be able to make your own plants.

How to preserve

Lavender stems can be harvested and bunched together to be hung upside down and dried in a dust-free environment with plenty of circulation. Once dry, lavender can be stored in a cool, dark place (preferably in glass) for several years. Lavender won't go bad if you store it longer, but the aromatic oils begin to dissipate after the first year and fade away over time.

Fresh lavender flowers can be preserved in sugar, which makes a lovely additive to teas and a pretty topping for baked goods. You can also add fresh lavender sprigs to vinegars and dried lavender petals to oils for cosmetics and herbal preparations. Lavender petals can also be dried to use in the following Lavender and Lemon Frozen Yogurt recipe.

~Tessa of Homestead Lady

Lavender Vanilla Frozen Yogurt

This recipe is GAPS compliant if you use raw dairy. It also calls for raw honey as a sweetener, instead of processed sugar. If you're on a Paleo diet and eschew raw dairy, you can make this recipe with coconut milk yogurt (in place of the yogurt) and coconut cream (in place of the cultured cream). The flavor and texture will be a bit different but not unpleasant, in my opinion. (Of course, I'm a big fan of coconut anything.) You can also use pasteurized honey and dairy products.

Ingredients:
4 cups Raw milk yogurt
½ cup Cultured cream* (similar to sour cream)
4 tsp. Dried lavender, to taste
1 tbsp. Organic gelatin
1 tsp Vanilla, to taste
Lemon zest from two lemons
½ cup Raw honey

Method:
Bring the cream to about 110 degrees, stir in the gelatin until dissolved

Check that the temperature is still at 110 and add the lavender; steep for 30 minutes to several hours, then strain out lavender and add to compost

Add all ingredients to a blender body and blend until smooth

Freeze in ice cream maker according to manufacturer's instructions

For soft yogurt, serve immediately; for a firmer product, freeze 30 to 60 minutes

Garnish with more lemon zest or lavender flowers

*To make cultured cream pour off a quart of raw cream (cow cream is easiest to use because of the visible cream line). Add 1-2 tablespoons of culture (from yogurt, sour cream, milk kefir or powdered starter culture) and stir in vigorously. Cover and keep in a warm place (75-90 degrees) for at least 24 hours. I usually heat it up a bit in my dehydrator set at 90 degrees for an hour or so. Then I put it in with my homemade yogurt jars to culture in an ice chest, wrapped all together in a blanket.) The cream will thicken more and culture stronger the longer it sits. This is one of the most divine substances you'll ever put in your mouth. I usually make a half gallon at a time because my children eat it so fast.

Lemon Balm - *Melissa officinalis*

Lemon balm is a perennial herb that makes a great addition to home herb gardens and can easily be grown in pots for small spaces. Lemon balm is indeed lemony in flavor making it a great way for folks in the north to get that flavor when citrus can't be grown. It's also a great multi-tasking herb in that it has a bunch of medicinal as well as culinary uses in the home kitchen.

Planting Lemon Balm

Lemon balm can be started by sowing seeds indoors about 6 weeks before the last frost and transplanted outdoors. The seeds can be very slow to germinate, however; taking as long as 21 days. Root division of lemon balm is usually an easier way to get it in the garden. Ask a neighbor or friend for a few roots and it'll be taking root quickly. It can grow well in sun or partial shade.

Enemies of Lemon Balm

Lemon balm isn't often bothered by insects. Even deer tend to ignore lemon balm.

Harvesting Lemon Balm

Cut stems of lemon balm, about 1 inch above the soil, before it flowers for best flavor. Harvest small amounts as needed or do large harvests for drying. Most gardening zones will get at least 2 harvests a year as lemon balm grows fast.

Drying Lemon Balm

Hang the stems in bunches upside down out of direct sunlight. Let dry until crispy and remove leaves from the stems. Store the dried leaves in an airtight container.

~Kathie of Homespun Seasonal Living

Lemon Balm Poppy Seed Cookies

Ingredients:
1 cup Butter, softened
1 1/2 cups Sugar
2 Eggs
2 3/4 cups Unbleached all-purpose flour
1 tsp. Baking soda
2 tsp. Cream of Tartar
1 1/2 cups lemon balm, finely chopped
2 tbsp. poppy Seeds

Method:
Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Line cookies sheets with silicone baking mats or parchment paper.

Sift together the flour, baking soda, and cream of tartar. Set aside.

Cream together the butter, lemon balm, and sugar. Add the eggs and beat well. Slowly add the dry ingredients to the butter mixture, stirring well. Pour in the poppy seeds and mix until thoroughly combined.

Drop Tablespoons full of dough onto prepared cookie sheets about 3" apart. These cookies spread give them room. Bake in preheated oven for 10-12 minutes, until edges are golden. Remove to wire cookie racks to cool completely.

Lovage - *Levisticum officinale*

Lovage is perennial herb that tastes quite a bit like celery. It's an easy to grow, large herb and provides great celery flavor to savory dishes and soups. This herb can easily reach heights over 6 feet after a couple of years and gets quite bushy and is loved by pollinators when it blooms.

Planting Lovage

One lovage plant usually provides enough for a single household. It can be started by seed by will take root faster when done by division or by transplanting a start from a greenhouse. A plant can easily reach heights of over 6 feet and get quite bushy, so give it room. Other plants around it should be shade loving as well.

Enemies of Lovage

Insects are not usually a problem, nor are deer for lovage. They can sometimes be bothered by aphids but it's rare for it to become a large problem, needing any attention from the gardener.

Harvesting Lovage

Harvest lightly the first year, but after that feel free to harvest as much as needed. Cut the stalks while still small and before flowering. Hang the stalks in bunches upside down out of direct sunlight. When crispy dry, remove the leaves from the stalks and store in glass jars.

Using Lovage

Use lovage either fresh or dried anywhere celery would normally be used. Go lighter in quantity as lovage has a stronger flavor than celery - a little goes a long way. Toss leaves into the cavity of chicken as it roasts, use in soups and stews, casseroles and more.

~Kathie of Homespun Seasonal Living

Lovage Salt

Ingredients:
¼ cup coarse salt
2 tbsp. dried and crumbled lovage leaves

Method:

Mix the salt and dried lovage together well. Store in an airtight jar.

For a finer mixture, pulse in a food processor or blender.

Use as a substitute for celery salt in any recipe.

Mint - Mentha

(varieties include *M. viridis* and *M. piperita)*

Mint is really the perfect plant to begin to build your herb garden. It's super easy to grow and is really fun to add to recipes, including ice tea or lemonade. It helps with digestion and makes a wonderfully refreshing hot tea. But be forewarned, mint sends out runners and can easily take over your entire herb garden.

Planting Mint

The hardest part of planting mint is deciding what variety to get; there is peppermint, spearmint, sweet mint and even chocolate mint to chose from.

You can buy a transplant from the nursery or get a runner from a friend's plant - they will be more than happy to share. If you don't want your mint to spread you need to plant it in a pot even if you're planting outside. Some people plant the pot in the ground so it contains the roots but doesn't look like a potted plant.

Mint likes damp soil so it makes a great ground cover in areas where other things won't grow. If you have a damp area from air conditioning unit or drain pipe that's a great place to put mint. We planted it in a place where my children seem to always leave the water hose running when they water their chickens.

Enemies of Mint

Mint is super hardy; however, when it's young and tender it can be susceptible to whiteflies, spider mites, slugs and snails. I've never had a problem with any of these pests, however, I will say that rabbits love mint.

Harvesting and Storing Mint

You can harvest mint at any time. For a large harvest wait until the plant flowers for the most intense flavor. Mint can be used fresh or can be dried by hanging up in small bunches or in a dehydrator. Dried mint should be stored in a glass jar in a dark place.

~Angi of SchneiderPeeps

Hot Mint Tea and Honey

There are many ways you can make hot tea with mint or other herbs. I like to use a tea ball like the one in the photo. I also have a mesh tea strainer that fits right in a cup that is good for fresh herbs. But you can also just steep the herbs in a pan with a little water and then strain out the herbs before pouring the tea in your cup.

My favorite sweetener for hot tea is honey, just a teaspoon or so will do nicely.

Add a little lemon and you have a great tea for those chilly evenings or when you have a stomachache or a cold. In fact, my kids call this “special water”.

Ingredients:
1 tbsp. Dried mint (or 3 tbsp fresh)
Hot water
Honey
Lemon

Method:
Boil water. Put mint in a tea ball or strainer and put it into cup. Pour boiling water over tea. Put a saucer over cup to keep the volatile oils from evaporating in the steam and let it steep for 5 minutes. Add honey and enjoy!

Rosemary - Rosmarinus officinalis

Rosemary is one of the first herbs I ever tried to grow when I started gardening years ago. I bought a .75 plant at Walmart, stuck it in the garden and snipped it here and there that summer. Since I live in a zone 9 gardening area, my rosemary didn't die during the winter and that next summer we had a 3' shrub in our garden! I was hooked on herbs. There was no way I was going to continue buying dried herbs at the grocery store when I could just grow my own.

Planting Rosemary

I find that purchasing a rosemary transplant is the best way to start rosemary. You can cut some new growth off a plant you already have (or that a friend has) and dip it in rooting hormone and plant it. But for a plant that will give me years of seasoning I don't have a problem spending the money to buy a transplant.

Plant rosemary in full sun, with lots of room and good drainage. If you live in a gardening zone 8 or above you can plant your rosemary in the ground and it will grow year round. If you live when it gets cold, you can grow rosemary in a pot and bring it in during the winter. The main thing with rosemary is to not overwater it or to over fertilize it. In fact, rosemary is one plant that does best when it's not fussed over.

Rosemary's Enemies

Like most herbs, there are not many pests that like rosemary. If you plant your rosemary indoors, make sure that you allow the soil to dry out between waterings to discourage powdery mildew. Whiteflies, aphids and spider mites can also enjoy your rosemary. It's best if you can catch them early to avoid a full on infestation. But if you do get an infestation you can spray with an insecticidal soap.

Harvesting and Preserving Rosemary

Rosemary can be harvested at any time, just cut a twig as you need it. You can also cut several twigs, tie them together and hang them to dry out. Store dried rosemary in a glass jar in a cool dark cabinet. Rosemary can also be chopped and frozen.

~Angi of SchneiderPeeps

Smashed Baked Potatoes

Ingredients:
Whole red potatoes (or other small potatoes)
Olive oil
Sea salt
Black Pepper
Rosemary (I cut off a 6”-8” twig to use)

Method:
Boil potatoes in salted water until you can poke a fork through them.

Next, get a cookie sheet (or baking sheet or sheet pan) and drizzle it with olive oil. Take the potatoes out of the water and put them on the pan.

Smash each one with a potato smasher. Once or twice is plenty.

Brush the tops with olive oil (yes, brush it on - don’t to use spray oil). Sprinkle with salt, pepper and chopped rosemary. Sprinkle liberally!

Bake at 450 degrees for 20 minutes until golden brown.

Sage – *Salvia officinalis*

Sage (Salvia officinalis) is commonly referred to as common sage, or garden sage, but common doesn't do it justice and it deserves a bit of space in the garden. Don't worry, forming a 2' ball at full-size, it won't take up much space. With its woody stems and soft, silver leaves, sage can be planted in an ornamental garden and none would be the wiser. It is a perennial plant, so you need only plant it once and you can use enjoy it for 3-4 years before it begins to look lackluster.

How to Plant

Although sage can be grown from seed, the best way to start it in the garden is to make friends with someone who already has an established plant. Seeds or cuttings should be started indoors, eight weeks before the estimated spring frost. Once danger of frost as passed, seedlings or rooted plants can be moved outdoors. Space them approximately 2' apart in a sunny location.

If you are planting your sage in a vegetable garden, it makes an excellent companion to carrots and cabbage, but don't plant too close to cucumbers. The potent aroma of sage can actually change the flavor of your cucumbers.

After the first season of growing sage, you can begin to harvest lightly. By the second year, you can safely trim off a good amount of the plant to enjoy indoors. To harvest, just trim the stem (no more that 2/3 the stem length) then strip the leaves. Sage can be frozen or dried, but for culinary purposes, it's best used fresh.

Medicinal Uses

A sage gargle is my go-to home remedy for sore throats. To make a gargle, steep a pinch of leave into a couple ounces of boiling water. Once it has cooled, remove the tea ball and add a splash of apple cider vinegar. Gargle the remedy until the glass is empty. Repeat two or three times a day until the pain is relieved.

Culinary Uses for Sage

Sage goes beyond flavoring when used in recipes. It also aids in digestion. Although it can be used in sauces and cheeses, the food most associated with sage is stuffing. I find that sage doesn't have a flavor, necessarily, but it heightens the flavors already in the recipe.

~Jess of The 104 Homestead

Homemade Sage Stuffing

This is a Thanksgiving staple in our home, but it is lovely any time of year.

Ingredients:

2 Loaves of sandwich bread (homemade is best as it's hardier and doesn't get soggy)
1 cup Salted butter
1 cup Chicken stock (or vegetable for vegetarian stuffing)
1 cup Minced onion
1 cup Chopped celery
5 tbsp. Minced fresh sage
1 tsp. Salt
1 tsp. White pepper

Method:

Preheat your oven to 350ºF. Cut the sandwich bread into 1" cubes and set them aside.

In a large, deep skillet, melt butter over low heat. I like to use cast iron. Add the minced onions and chopped celery. Saute until the vegetables are translucent, but don't let them brown. Add the salt and pepper and fresh sage, and cook until you can smell the sage's flavor.

Remove the skillet from heat and allow it to cool enough to safely handle. Toss in the bread cubes. Using your hands, make sure all the bread is coated in the mixture. Transfer it from the skillet to a baking dish and pour the stock over it. Bake covered at 350ºF for 30 minutes, uncovering in the last 10 minutes of cooking to let the bread crisp.

Meet the Authors

Kathie is a writer, gardener, and teacher living with her soulmate, Jeff, in northwestern Montana. As a fiercely D.I.Y. individual, she is dedicated to living a life made of her own hands as much as possible. You can read about her D.I.Y. and seasonal living adventures at Homespun Seasonal Living (http://homespunseasonalliving.com) and be sure to sign up for her newsletter here.

Tessa Zundel is the homemaking, homeschooling, homesteading mother of five small children and wife to one long-suffering man. She is the voice behind the blogs Homestead Lady and Farm Sprouts. She is also the author of *The Do It Yourself Homestead*. She lives with her family in southwest Missouri on twenty acres of hidden ponds and fairy forests.

Visit her any time at Homestead Lady. To join her complimentary homestead newsletter, click here. To join her Book Circle to learn more about the book, *The Do It Yourself Homestead,* and receive special offers and discounts, click here.

Angi Schneider is a writer and crafter who is passionate about living a simple life and encouraging others to do the same. She lives with her husband and children on a small homestead along the Texas Gulf Coast where they raise a chickens, bees, a large garden and a growing orchard. She's also the owner of SchneiderPeeps, which is a simple living blog, and the author of several ebooks, including The Gardening Notebook.

You can find encouragement for your own simple living journey by subscribing to her newsletter which will also give you access to an exclusive subscriber freebie page.

Jessica Lane is a wife and mother of three. She lives on 1/4 acre with her family, as well as a flock of ducks, chickens, and quail. Jessica grows the majority of the produce her family needs, despite the small space. Her mission is to teach others how to overcome obstacles and homestead where they live. She does this through her site, The 104 Homestead (http://104homestead.com), her books, as well as through local community classes she teaches. Sign up for Jessica's weekly newsletter, The Homestead Helper, and receive a complimentary copy of her newest book, Welcome to the World of Homesteading.

Chris is a teacher, an author, a gardener, and an herbalist with 30+ years' experience growing herbs and formulating herbal remedies and skin care products. Chris completed the Intermediate Herbal Course with The Herbal Academy in 2014 and is currently enrolled in the Making Herbal Medicine Course with Chestnut School of Herbs. The desire to bring the hopeful message of the Biblical promise of herbs for the "healing of the nations" informs her work. Chris began blogging in 2007 at JoybileeFarm.com. Her book, *The Beginners' Book of Essential Oils* is available on Amazon. Get a complimentary copy of her book, *4 Keys to Food Security and Homestead Abundance* now.