

Keep fresh herbs, edible flowers handy with a kitchen garden

By Amanda Pace and William Kollar

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If you're looking for a simple and rewarding garden project this spring, here's one; a beautiful kitchen garden filled with herbs and edible flowers. Here's how:

1. Pick a sunny area close to the kitchen. Most herb varieties need at least five hours of full sun a day. Keeping the garden close to the kitchen makes the harvest convenient.
2. Decide on the size of your garden. Keep the size proportional to the area you have available. You don't want it to overwhelm your space or plant more than you are willing to take care of.
3. Gather your materials. For a 15-foot garden you'll need:
 - Trowel.
 - Steel rake.
 - Flat shovel.
 - Soil amendments (whatever will allow you to create a loose, well-drained soil).
 - Fertilizer (Osmocote 14-14-14).
 - Sixty-seven linear feet of slate.
 - Three bales of pine straw.
 - Garden feature (birdbath, statuary, sundial, etc.).

Plants

- Six nasturtium.
- Agastache^{*}.
- Two society garlic.
- Two lemon verbena.
- Two oregano.
- Two purple leaf basil.
- Two chives.
- Two upright rosemary.
- Parsley, curly or flat.
- Two flats of pansies.

4. Clear the area. Because we are going to plant herbs and edible flowers, stay away from using chemicals to kill the grass. With a can of spray paint, outline the

circle on the ground. Next, shave the ground with a sharp shovel to a level that removes the grass and its roots. This is labor-intensive but the result is, by far, superior.

5. Amend the area by adding material (sand, compost, fertilizer, etc.) to the existing soil to create a healthy growing environment. Herbs prefer the pH level to rest around 6.5 and they need a well-drained soil.

Because the area is small, amend the entire site instead of the individual holes. If you are starting with a heavy clay soil, add a good bit of sand and loose organic matter (composted leaves and manure, crushed pine bark) to allow for better oxygen flow and drainage. Beware of prepackaged potting or topsoil mixes. They tend to be soggy and retain too much water for clay soils. If you have a sandy soil you need to strengthen it by adding moisture-retaining organic matter. Supplement either with an all-purpose fertilizer.

6. Turn the soil to a depth of 12 inches. If you have a tiller, use it. If not, rent one for a few hours or you can turn the soil by hand with a shovel.

7. Break the circle into four equal parts by dividing it in half vertically, and again, horizontally. With the back of the steel rake move the dirt to the center of the quadrants creating four small mounds. In other words, where you will be planting the rosemary and Agastache will be highest points in the circle.

8. Place your garden feature in the center of the circle.

9. Place perimeter and interior slate in a consistent pattern.

10. Mulch your planting area. Laying your pine straw before planting is always good when your plant material is small.

11. Lay out your plants.

12. Plant. Pull the pine straw apart enough to dig a small hole with your trowel. Dig your hole slightly larger (no deeper) than the size container it is in. Do not leave exposed roots or plant too deep.

13. Water well. These plants need water every couple of days, and if you give the garden about 10 minutes per week, the weeds won't get out of hand.

And remember, the more you use your herbs, the fuller they will be.

Amanda Pace and William Kollar are landscape designers with Gardens Inc. and members of the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee.

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— Gardeners have known about *Agastache foeniculum* since the 1800s. The anise or giant blue hyssop, a half-hardy perennial herb has licorice-scented leaves.