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The National Herb Garden

at the U.S. National Arboretum



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Program
Aid
Number 1261

Prepared by
Agricultural
Research
Service

From Shakespeare—

“mickle is the powerful grace that lies in herbs”

To Simon and Garfunkel—

“parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme” we have prized, written, and sung about the marvelous qualities of herbs.

In ancient times, rue was believed to cure bald headedness and inebriation. Rosemary was used to ward off the evil of witches. And nearly every herb imaginable was tried at some time or other to heal or cure or to concoct a love potion.

Migrating people, across time, have carefully carried along their herbal plants and seeds, which they valued for medicinal, savory, aromatic, or economic qualities.

And we still value them today for these qualities: We may take horehound drops to soothe our coughs, polish our furniture with marjoram and lavender oils, sip mint juleps or rosehip tea, and season the simplest or most elegant dishes with basil or tarragon.

Thousands of herbs could be planted in the National Herb Garden. Those you see here have been selected to demonstrate the significance of plants in human life.

Knowledge of herb uses is constantly increasing, and the plantings will be changed to reflect these uses. Gardens also change as plants flourish or perish, so the Herb Garden can never be static. But it should give you new ideas with each visit.

The Herb Garden covers about 2 acres (0.8 hectare) in a meadow opposite the National Arboretum's Administration Building. The design concept is of three separate but closely related sections—the Knot Garden, the Historic Rose Garden, and the Specialty Garden.

Plant material masses, changes in elevation, and trellises are used to separate and, at the same time, integrate the gardens. Inside the gardens, plants are organized in strong patterns, with plantings along the edges loosely arranged to provide a transition from the gardens to the surrounding meadow. All gardens are accessible by wheelchair.

You will enter at the reception area, which is a brick-paved terrace, about 50 feet (15 meters) in diameter, with a central pool. The terrace is surrounded by



*Red
bergamot*

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You will enter at the reception area, which is a brick paved terrace, about 50 feet (15 meters) in diameter, with a central pool. The terrace is surrounded by

osmanthus hedges with collections of thymes in semicircular beds. The view from the terrace is over the knot garden to the meadow beyond.

The Knot Garden

The classic elements of the knot garden design, which was fashionable during the 16th century in England, are carried out here. However, because of the large size of this garden, dwarf evergreens, rather than traditional small herbs, are used to create the intricate patterns of the knot.

The knot itself is about 25 by 50 feet (8 by 15 meters) in a larger 60- by 80-foot (18- by 24-meter) sunken space beyond the reception area. The formal knot expresses the traditional elegance of garden design that originated in Europe.

Three types of dwarf evergreens—cultivars of arborvitae, cypress, and holly—are planted here: *Thuja occidentalis* 'Rheindiana Globosa,' *Chamaecyperis pisifera* 'Squarrosa Pygmaea,' and *Ilex crenata* 'Helleri.' Their resins, barks, and needles have been used for medicinal or industrial purposes.

The Historic Rose Garden

Next, you will come to the Historic Rose Garden. It is about 50 by 80 feet (15 by 24 meters) and bounded by *Taxus* hedges on two sides, by an open grouping of airy trees of herbal value on the meadow side, and, on the fourth side, by a trellis-covered sitting area. These roses were chosen as representatives of roses long used for medicine, perfume, food, and pleasure.

Most of the roses in the collection bloom only in June or early in July.

Roses of historic interest and fragrant plants also surround a modern version of an ancient astronomical instrument—an armillary sphere. This decorative sphere can be used to tell "sun time."

The collection includes varieties of French roses (*Rosa gallica*), Damask roses (*R. damascena*), Alba roses (*R. alba*), cabbage roses (*R. centifolia*), China roses (*R. chinensis*), and rugosa roses (*R. rugosa*).

The Specialty Gardens

The third Garden actually consists of 10 Specialty Gardens, arranged along the perimeter of a grassy oval about 150 feet (46 meters) long. Inside the oval are small trees of herbal interest. Each specialty garden is separated by boxwood hedges, and each is large enough to contain a collection of special plants for teaching and studying purposes.

1. Dioscorides' Garden includes a representative herb selection from plants listed about 60 A.D. by a Greek physician, Dioscorides. The modern science of pharmacology started with his efforts to list systematically the plants that were used for medicine. His list, *De Materia Medica*, was used as a basis for the early herbals, still referred to in the 20th century.

Planted here are marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*), anise (*Pimpinella anisum*), coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), garlic (*Allium sativum*), oregano (*Origanum vulgare*), and chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*).

2. The Dye Garden includes plants used for dyes in both the past and the present.

Planted here are agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*), madder (*Rubia tinctorum*), and henna (*Lawsonia inermis*).

3. The Early American Garden contains plants brought from the Old World by colonists, as well as native plants that were used in colonial times.

Planted here are pepper (*Capsicum annum*), chicory (*Cichorium intybus*), mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), and canaigre (*Rumex hymenosepalus*).

4. Herbs Around the World plantings will be changed from time to time to show herbs from different parts of the globe.

5. Plants in Medicine include herbs used in modern medicine or plants from which alkaloids have been synthesized for medicinal use.

Planted here are red periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*), Ephedra officinalis, Hyssopus officinalis, and Digitalis purpurea.

Red
bergamot



Headstuffed



Capsicum
pepper



Bay



6. The Culinary Garden is a collection of herbs used for flavoring and seasoning food.

Planted here are basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), dill (*Anethum graveolens*), mints (*Mentha* spp.), and summer savory (*Satureia hortensis*).

7. The Industrial Garden includes plants that are sources of fuel, oil, pesticides, fibers, and other essential products for modern industry.

Planted here are angelica (*Angelica archangelica*), perilla (*Perilla frutescens*), licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), saffron (*Crocus sativus*), and sesame (*Sesamum indicum*).

8. The Fragrance Garden is a collection of plants that have historically been grown for their sweet scents and the pleasure they give.

Planted here are rose geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens*), English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus*), and clary (*Salvia sclarea*).

9. The Oriental Garden is a selection of herbs used in China and Japan.

Planted here are oriental onion (*Allium chinensis*), lemon (*Citrus limon*), common ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), perilla (*Perilla frutescens*), chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum indicum*), and *Zanthoxylum piperitum*.

10. The Beverage Garden contains plants used for teas or for flavoring liqueurs and other beverages.

Planted here are mountain balm (*Calamintha officinalis*), mints (*Mentha* spp.), coffee (*Coffea arabica*), cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*), and tea (*Camellia sinensis*).

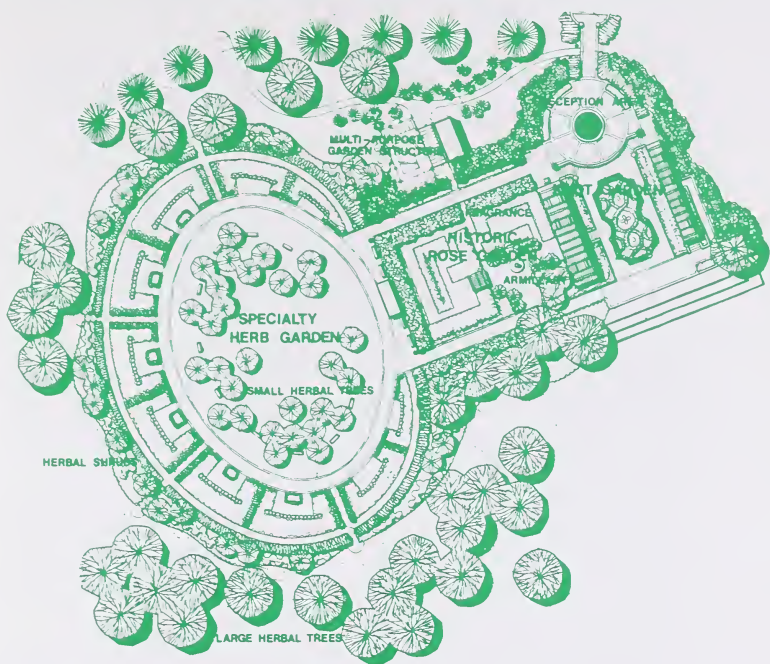
The specialty gardens are surrounded by trees and shrubs of herbal interest. Both native and foreign species, they have been most frequently used for medicines or dyes.

Related Gardens and Facilities

Other facilities associated with the National Herb Garden include a trial and propagation garden, which is a secluded area holding coldframes and compost bins. Here, new plants may be tried out and



Salad burnet



special propagation done. The Herb Garden Curator's Building houses an office for records and an area for potting and propagating. Also available is space for teaching those skills.

Along the walk in front of the trial and propagation area, a bed of *Capsicum* (hot peppers) displays the range of colorful variation in this historic culinary plant.

Origins of the Herb Garden

The National Herb Garden at the National Arboretum has been a joint project of the Herb Society of America and the Arboretum since 1965. In 1976, the Herb Society presented \$17,760 to the Department of Agriculture as a Bicentennial gift to begin the garden. The Herb Society then raised the majority of the contributed funds, and Congress appropriated matching funds for the garden. Other donors include garden clubs, companies, and interested individuals. Construction began in 1979 and planting in 1980.

The Herb Society

The Herb Society of America, founded in 1933, is concerned with the cultivation of herbs and with the study of their history and uses: with their roles, both past and present, as flavoring agents; as medicinal, fragrant, and dye plants; as ornamentals in garden design; as household aids; and as economic plants supplying sources of fuel, oil, rubber, and other essential products for modern society. The Herb Society of America is not medically oriented.

The U.S. National Arboretum

The U.S. National Arboretum is concerned primarily with educating the public and conducting research on trees, shrubs, and plants of ornamental or useful interest. It is part of the Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.



