

Bringing Herbs Indoors

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Many of us gardeners also love to cook. All summer we've enjoyed cutting fresh herbs to use in our recipes. With summer over and the first frost imminent in the high country, how can we continue to enjoy fresh herbs in our garden? One solution is to buy herbs at the grocery store although that can be expensive. A better solution is to bring our herbs indoors so we can enjoy using them year-round.

The best time bring your herbs inside is before the first frost, which can be any day now. Perennial herbs such as parsley, sage, mint, and chives can be divided in the fall. When dividing, place some back in the garden and pot one or two of the healthiest for your indoor herb garden. Pot the herbs in fresh, commercial potting soil and water them well.

If your herbs are already in pots, check to see if they need repotting. Fresh soil and enough room for the roots will help them make the transition indoors. Before bringing plants indoors, check each plant for pests by inspecting the stems and leaves. It's a good idea, once you have them in the house, to keep them away from other plants, just in case they have any insects or eggs you might have missed.

Coming indoors can be traumatic to your herbs. They've been used to direct sunlight, rain, wind, and temperature variations. Before permanently placing them in your home, first set the plants out of direct sunlight for a few days to get them used to indoor conditions. Then bring them in for a few hours to get them used to the indoors. If you have time, and they're not in danger of frost, repeat this process for up to a week.

Herbs need at least 6 hours of direct sunlight each day. A sunny windowsill works great. Turn your herbs regularly so they'll grow evenly. If you don't have enough natural light, use an inexpensive fluorescent shop light with a cool fluorescent or grow bulb. Hang the light about 6 inches above the plants and give them several hours of light each day. This lighting method also works great if you're starting herbs from seed.

You can add to your herb collection by taking cuttings and starting new plants. You can propagate lavender, comfrey, horehound, oregano, peppermint, tarragon, thyme, lemon balm, scented geraniums, sage and rosemary from cuttings. Healthy tip growth makes the best cuttings. When taking cuttings, snip off a 4-5 inch length of stem, remove all but the topmost leaves, and insert into a loose potting soil. Keep the cuttings moist until they become rooted, then transplant to larger containers. Fertilize sparingly and water regularly.

Herbs can be beautiful indoors and nothing can replace fresh herbs in your home cooking. Imagine an indoor garden of basil, thyme, parsley, sage, rosemary, and chives. So have some fun and save some money by bringing your herbs indoors this fall.

For more information - <http://cmg.colostate.edu/pubs.shtml#housepts>,

For questions regarding produce, landscape, and horticulture questions; please contact the Teller County, Colorado Master Gardener grow line at 686-7980, visit our website at www.co.teller.co.us/csu or visit our booth at the Woodland Park farmers' market.