

How to Start a Windowsill Herb Garden

James Nichnadowicz, Union County 4-H Agent

Materials

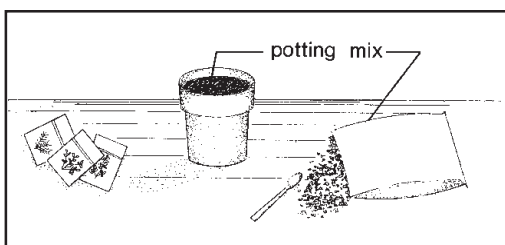
- Herb seeds
- Clean clay or plastic pots
- Sterile potting soil
- 2 oz plastic drinking cups
- Clear plastic food wrap
- A window with southern exposure **OR** a fluorescent fixture with cool white bulbs
- Waterproof marking pen
- Rubber bands

Herb Seeds

First, select the herbs you like for cooking. Basil, parsley (flat and curled), chives, thyme, rosemary, and sage are easy to grow indoors. Simple to sprout from seed, they make attractive plants if pinched back regularly. To purchase seeds, check with your local garden center or write to your favorite seed companies. Some may also carry started plants.

Potting Mix

Use a well-drained artificial soil mix consisting of peat moss, vermiculite, and perlite. Remove sticks and clumps, as those will block germination of seeds.

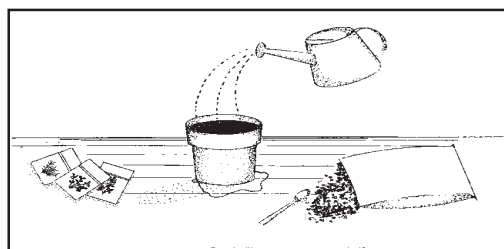


Containers

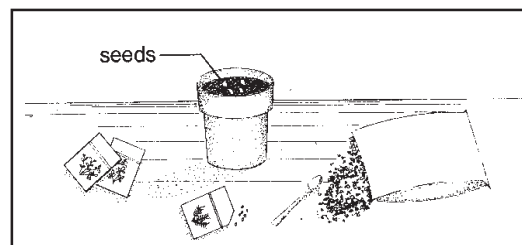
To avoid overwatering your seedlings, start them in small containers. A 2-ounce **plastic**, not waxed paper, drinking cup works well. Be certain, however, that it has drainage holes in the bottom. If not, **several** small holes should be made with a sharp instrument.

Sowing Herb Seeds

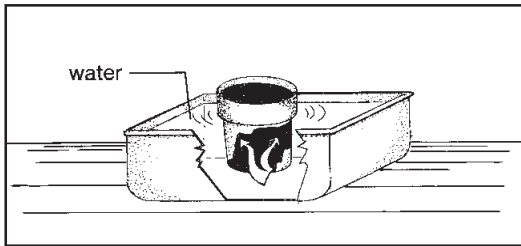
1. **Label containers**—date and plant name with a waterproof pen.
2. Fill a 2-ounce container with **soil mix**.
3. Using **warm** water, soak the pots until water runs through drainage holes.



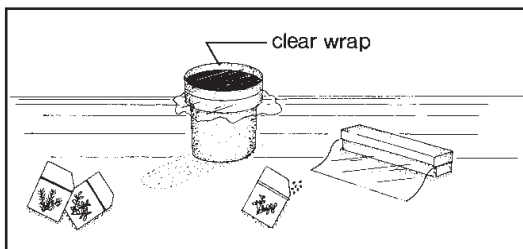
4. Place **four** (4) seeds on the soil surface.



- Cover seeds with **1/4-inch** of artificial soil mix.
- Tamp** the soil **lightly**. This brings the seed in close contact with the soil.
- Set the bottom of the pot in **warm** water. The water should **not** be above the rim of the pot. Water will move into the soil through the drainage holes. When the surface of the soil appears wet, pots should be removed.



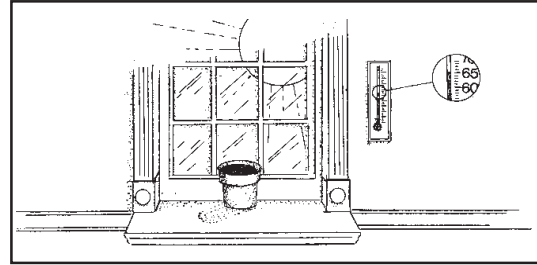
- Cover pots with clear plastic and secure with rubber bands. (Remove plastic as soon as seeds sprout).
- Place pots in a **warm** location (70 to 75°F.)—the top of a hot water heater is a good location.



- Keep soil damp at all times. If necessary, water again from the bottom. (See step #7).

Care After Germination

- Remove plastic covering as **soon** as seeds sprout. Be patient! Some herbs such as parsley can take 3 to 4 weeks to sprout.
- Move plants under **fluorescent** lights or to a window that receives full sun most of the day. **NOTE:** fluorescent lights should be 4 to 8 inches above the plants and left on 14 to 18 hours per day. (The cost of power for lights is minimal). Also, the temperature in this area should be **above** 65°F. at all times.



- Water plants thoroughly with a solution of water and **houseplant fertilizer** whenever the soil surface feels dry to the touch.

When each plant has four leaves, pull out all but the healthiest plant from each pot.

- Repotting** of the plant is necessary when it begins to dry quickly between waterings. Use the next largest size container. Ultimately, a 5-inch pot should be large enough to contain a mature plant.

Picking Herbs

After the plants have been transplanted **twice**, (6 to 10 weeks after sprouting), you can begin to harvest. Take only a few leaves, mostly lower ones, each time. This enables the plant to produce over a longer period.

**With appreciation to Charlene Costaris, Atlantic County Agricultural Agent, and Union County Master Gardeners: Peter Cunicella, Dorothy Herold, and Joanne Kenny.*

—Illustrations by Lynne Ziobro, Master Gardener, Union County

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