

Growing Herbs at the Community Garden

By Brenda Loveall and Claire Hanson

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This month Brenda Loveall shares her experience of growing herbs in her plot at the Community Garden. She makes it sound easy and fun, so if you have been wanting to try, here is some inspiration.

In early 2017 I began an online course in the study of herbs for medicinal uses, from the Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine. Having the opportunity to begin a new garden plot at the Community Garden, I was inspired to try growing some of the plants that I was learning about in the course. I chose calendula, chamomile, holy basil, lemon balm, sage and thyme as the most likely to be successful and to be frequently used for my own and my family's health and wellness.

All the herbs were started from plants purchased at the Boulder Farmer's Market, where there was a large selection of organic, biodynamic starts from a local organic nursery.

I added compost to my plot from the worm bin that I have at home, but didn't add any of the organic fertilizer provided for us by the Community Garden.

Due to my late start in planting, the starts escaped hail damage from the storm we had in early May, and even though there was not another hail storm, I was glad to have the hail cloth in place as I believe it helped protect the young plants a bit from the sun and from drying out in the wind.

Everything grew very well, tall and bushy. With the hail cloth covering over the plot, and fairly close spacing of the plants, there was no need to stake or support any of the plants - even the tall chamomile did not lean or blow over in the wind.

All the herbs were successful, I think because of the relatively wet growing season. I supplemented the drip irrigation with hand watering about once a week.

Specific things that I learned:

- Chamomile for tea needs to be harvested during a short time window when the flowers are not fully opened, and this was difficult to accomplish with having to drive to the Garden.
- Chamomile reseeds itself vigorously, so take care to avoid spreading it to other plots or areas where it is not wanted.
- Calendula does not do well in containers – I grew this at home and wish I had planted it in my Garden plot.
- Deadheading (removing spent flowers) is necessary to keep these herbs blooming throughout the summer.
- I wanted to grow stinging nettle for its medicinal properties, but not in a public garden where the stinging leaves would be a hazard to unwary visitors.



The herbs I chose were all for medicinal uses, except sage and thyme which I use for cooking. I make teas from chamomile, lemon balm, holy basil, and would like someday to use the calendula to make a healing salve.

For those interested in using herbs for medicinal purposes, there are many books and other resources available. If you want herbs for cooking, I urge you to try planting any that you enjoy. You will find that most herbs are tough and resilient, and not that demanding to grow. I'm looking forward to year 2 of my herb plot at the Community Garden.

Brenda Loveall is a long-time gardener from Indiana, who now makes her home in Estes Park. She has always loved gardening, however delving deeper into the medicinal herbs she has found that plants not only nourish the body but also heal and prevent illness as well.

Claire Hanson retired to Estes Park after a career that included a lot of editing in various university research settings. She is currently Secretary of the EVCG Board and will be a Community gardener again this spring.