

# HOME & GARDEN

## Herbs can add spice to winter

By PAT LEUCHTMAN  
Recorder Columnist

Still harvesting. I completely understand the friend who starts praying for the first frost about this time of year because it means her labors will be nearly at an end. I know I spend so much time harvesting, putting up vegetables and preparing the garden for winter that there hardly seems time for eating, but eating is always on my mind. And thinking of eating and of savory winter meals, this is the time to make preparations to guarantee fresh herbs through the winter.

Herbs can be harvested and dried during the summer and they will seem like a godsend some gray winter day, there are other ways to keep herbs available during the winter. First of all, certain leafy herbs can be frozen. Parsley, chives, chervil, marjoram, tarragon and basil can all be washed, dried off and frozen in small labeled plastic bags. They don't even need to be chopped. The chopping can be done when you pull them out to use. Although the frozen herbs will not be attractive enough to use as a garnish, the flavor will still be there, fresh and pungent.

It is even a good idea to freeze small packets of fines herbes mixture. *Fines herbes* is a common blend called for in many French recipes and having parsley, chives, chervil and marjoram mixed and packed together will save opening four separate bags every time an *omelette aux fines herbes* is in the ofing.

### BETWEEN THE ROWS

Basil leaves can go straight into little plastic bags or they can go into the blender with a little olive oil and then frozen. It keeps very well this way and it brings you halfway to a pesto sauce.

Rosemary is one of my favorite herbs and it makes as beautiful a houseplant as it does an important addition to my pantry. Rosemary is a very tender tropical plant whose native habitat is the hot, dry climate around the Mediterranean Sea. It does very well in a well-drained garden during the summer months, but before frost threatens it must be dug up and put into a pot using a potting soil that has been mixed with one-third sand or vermiculite to create a soil that will drain quickly. With a rosemary plant growing in a sunny window you will never lack a few sprigs of this versatile herb to season a simple dish of scrambled eggs, broiled fish, any roast or many types of vegetable soups.

There is also a handful of annual herbs that can be grown in pots on a sunny window sill during the winter. Just remember that herbs do not require a particularly rich soil, but they do need a soil that will drain quickly. They do not like to be kept damp. Besides mixing the potting soil with sand or vermiculite this also means that every pot should be well

"croaked" that is the bottom of every flower pot should be filled with pebbles or shards of old pots to keep the drainage hole free and prevent it being clogged with soil.

Chives, parsley, basil, chervil and dill are all annual herbs that grow easily from seed.

Parsley is notoriously slow to germinate, but there is a school of thought that says the seeds can be encouraged by pouring boiling water over them when they are first planted. This is supposed to crack the hard seed casing, permitting the plant to get off to a faster start. I know a number of people who swear by this method, but I haven't tried it myself because so far — (knock wood) I haven't had much trouble growing parsley. This doesn't say much for my virtue because tradition has it that only witches can grow parsley easily.

Don't be afraid of growing a tall plant like dill indoors. In a pot it will not grow so rambunctiously and judicious trimming from the top when you need a little dill for your fish or potatoes will keep the plant within reasonable bounds. Dill heads and dill seeds are the most commonly used parts of the plant used some pickling time, but the foliage will add that same special something to your cooking when it is chopped. I like cooking carrots with a teaspoon or so of dill seed and then serving with butter.

### Overwinter flowers

By TINA M. SMITH  
Franklin County  
Extension Service

STOP! Don't throw out that geranium or fuchsia! These two common garden flowers can be overwintered so you can enjoy their blossoms again next year.

Although fuchsias do well on a patio or in the yard, they can be difficult to grow indoors under normal house conditions. If you do decide to bring them in and try your hand at overwintering them, you must give these plants a resting period during November and December.

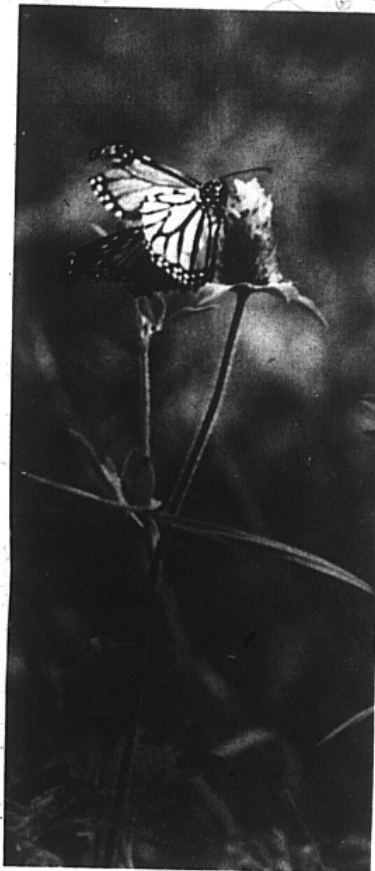
Bring in the hanging basket or dig up the plant in early September and bring indoors. Place the plant in a dimly lit, cool spot (50 degrees F.) like a basement. Prune back one-third to one-half the growth and water just enough to keep the plant alive.

During the middle of January bring the plant into a brighter area around 60 to 65 degrees F. Water sparingly and keep the plant in this location until new growth appears. Once you see new growth, cut away all dead and weak wood, and move to a bright spot, but no direct sun. Water to keep the soil evenly moist but not soggy. Remember, overwatering will cause the leaves to yellow and drop off. Fuchsias are heavy feeders; use a bi-weekly application of 5-10-10 or 5-10-5 water soluble plant food during the growing season. As soon as weather permits (about May 30) move the plants outdoors under the shade of a tree or porch.

If want to carry geraniums through, you can follow the same procedure mentioned above for fuchsias or you can take cuttings off the plants.

### Monarchs migrate

A monarch butterfly feeds on a lawn weed. The butterflies are now beginning their migration to warm Mexico. Fred Morrison will present a natural history film on monarch survival and a slide show of their wintering grounds at the Northfield Mountain Recreation Center Saturday from 1-3 p.m. A hike to nearby milkweed plant will give participants a chance to see the butterflies feed. Call 659-3714 for more information.



Recorder photo by Jim Mahoney

### GARDEN CALENDAR

The following information is provided by the Franklin County Extension Service.

Now is the time to:

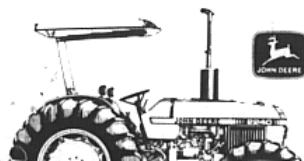
- start a compost pile with garden refuse. Do not compost diseased plants. You can obtain the bulletin "Composting" from the Extension Service.
- force your Christmas Cactus into setting flower buds. Expose the plant to short days beginning now. Keep it in total darkness for 12 to 14 hours each night until buds form. The temperature should be under 65 degrees F during this period. Buds will not form at temperatures over 70 degrees F. At 55 degrees F, flowering occurs regardless of day length.

Notes:

- Dig and store gladiolus when their leaves yellow.
- Increase rutabaga and carrot sweetness by allowing them to freeze in the ground one time before pulling.
- If grapes don't ripen, you need earlier varieties.
- Fireplace wood which is stored inside may be infested with wood boring beetles. Although they do not damage or infest the framework of the house or its contents, they are annoying. To reduce this nuisance, store firewood in a sheltered area away from the residence. Never spray the wood with pesticide because fumes given off when the wood is burned may be toxic. For a fact sheet on firewood pests contact the Extension Service.

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