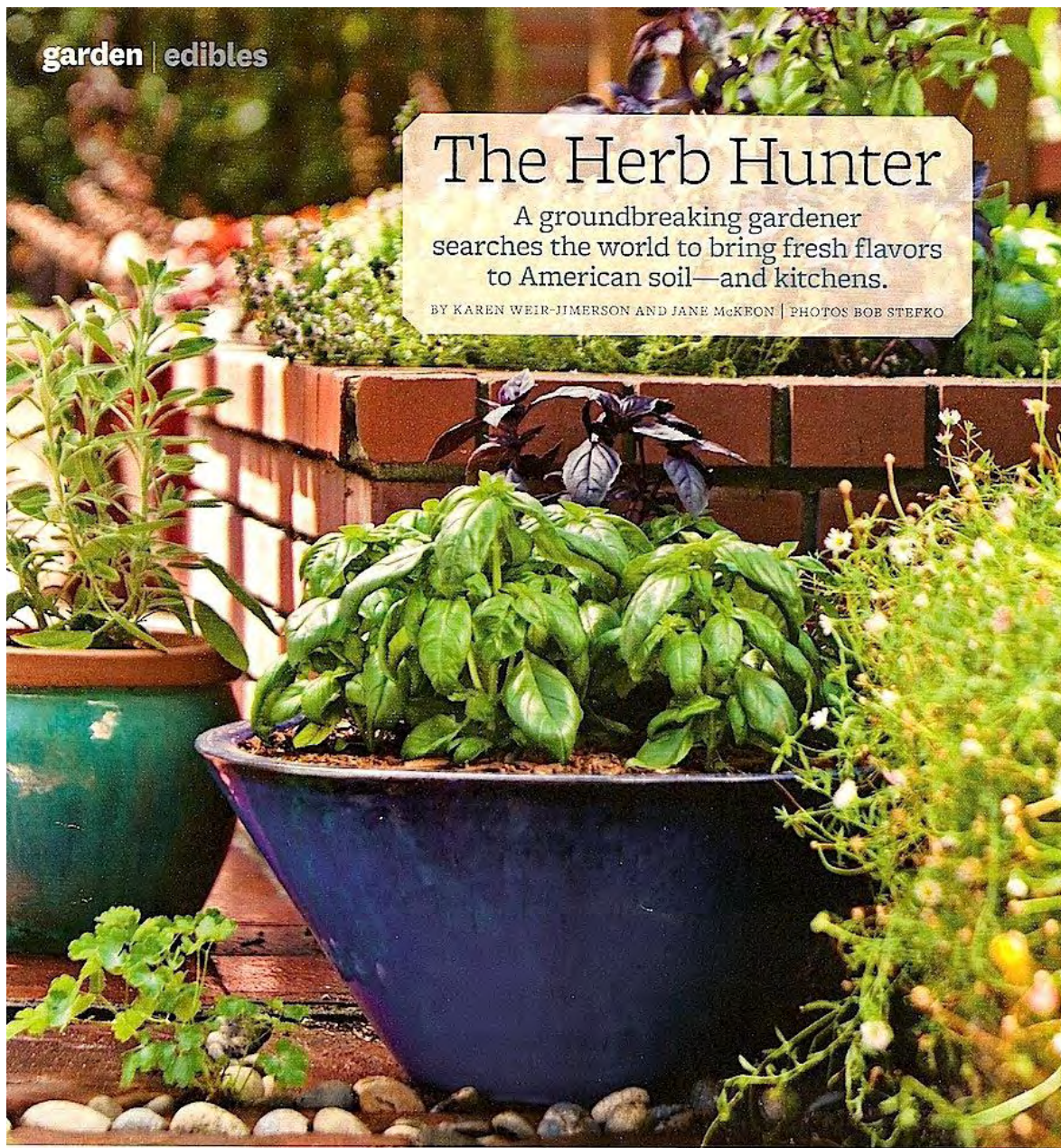


## The Herb Hunter

A groundbreaking gardener searches the world to bring fresh flavors to American soil—and kitchens.

BY KAREN WEIR-JIMMERSON AND JANE McKEON | PHOTOS BOB STEFKO



Italian Cameo (green) and Red Rubin (purple) basil, *above*, fill a pot with color and flavor. Both varieties offer full-size leaves on compact plants.

Want to open a world of possibilities in your garden? Just follow the roadmap laid out by Renee Shepherd, owner of specialty seed company Renee's Garden. She's traveled the globe to bring American gardeners heirloom and ethnic vegetable and herb varieties.

"Most people know that garden tomatoes taste better than ones you buy at a grocery store," Renee says. The same is true of herbs. "Having lots of homegrown herbs makes a big

difference in everyday cooking," she says. "We eat better when healthy foods taste better."

In addition to adding lots of flavor, herbs are a cinch to grow. Given well-drained soil, they'll flourish with little doting, except for an occasional drink. Herbs also cater to people who have little space to garden. "I'm always on the hunt for dwarf varieties that grow well in containers," Renee says. Finds from other lands must prove themselves first in her three regional trial gardens: "My business is based on people having success in their gardens."



## Herbs for every season

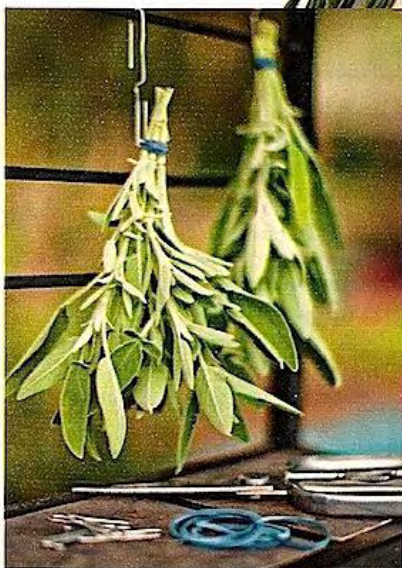
Here's how to get the most from your homegrown herbs.

### FRESH

Just-picked herbs offer superior flavor. Chop fresh leaves, such as Italian parsley, chives, dill, and mint, *bottom right*, as you need them. Refrigerate leftover leaves in green plastic produce bags—these allow ethylene gas (which hastens decay) to escape.

### DRIED

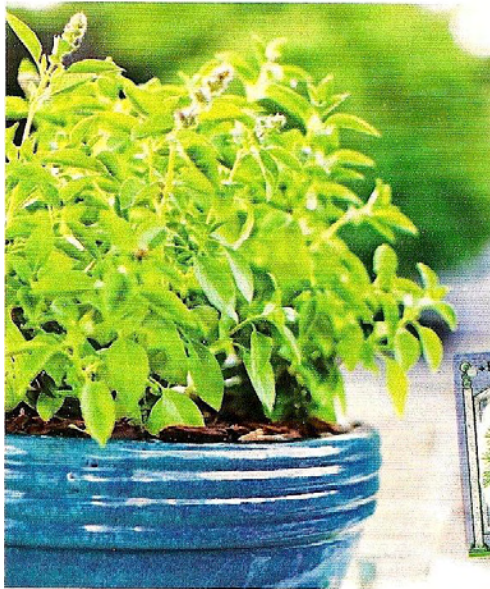
To dry herbs with essential oils—such as lavender (*right*), sage (*below*), thyme, and rosemary—hang bunches secured with rubber bands upside down in a dry place. Store dried leaves in jars for up to a year.



### FROZEN

Preserve the fresh flavors of herbs—such as flat-leaf parsley (*top*), basil, and chives—for later use by freezing them in ice cube trays. Place several leaves (or a spoonful of chopped leaves) in each cell, add water, and freeze. Pop out cubes as needed for recipes.





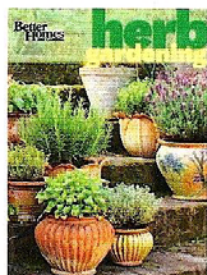
CONTAINER CULTURE

## Herbs in pots

Anyone with a container and a bag of soil can grow herbs. Follow these simple steps.

- 1** Sow seeds in seed-starting mix in early spring. After danger of frost is past, transplant seedlings outdoors to pots (with drainage holes) filled with all-purpose potting soil.
- 2** Plant herbs where they'll receive 6 or more hours of full sun each day. Indoors, a south- or west-facing window is best.
- 3** Allow soil to dry between waterings. Most herbs dislike wet feet.
- 4** Before the first fall frost, bring tender perennials—such as rosemary, oregano, thyme, and marjoram—indoors for the winter. Use or freeze all annual herbs, such as lemon basil, *above*. ■

Renee Shepherd has three criteria for the seeds she makes available at [reeneesgarden.com](http://reeneesgarden.com): "They must be beautiful, flavorful, and easy to grow," she says.



GOOD READ

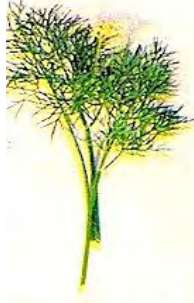
## Herb garden guide

*Better Homes and Gardens® Herb Gardening* is a comprehensive guide to planning, planting, and caring for a beautiful and delicious herb garden. Includes simple plans, recipes, and an encyclopedic listing of 145 herbs. (224 pages; \$20); [BHG.com/HerbBook](http://BHG.com/HerbBook)

For buying information see page 177.

## Renee's must-have herbs

"Herbs are where gardening and cooking meet," Renee says. Sample some of her favorites from around the world.



**DANISH DILL**  
Dukat dill is from Denmark. Harvest the sweet leaves before plants bloom for best flavor. Let some plants flower and use the seeds for pickling.



**ITALIAN FLAT-LEAF PARSLEY**  
Gigante Italian is an heirloom with large, glossy leaves that are subtly sweet. "I use big handfuls of it in salads," Renee says.



**FRENCH LAVENDER**  
Compact French Perfume blooms the first year from seed. Snip stems just as blooms open. Use the dried flowers in potpourris.



**THAI BASIL**  
With a distinctive clove/mint flavor, Queenette basil complements Asian recipes. Purple stems and blooms add ornamental value to this selection.



**ITALIAN OREGANO**  
Heirloom Italian bears tiny leaves that are milder and sweeter than other oregano varieties. Use the leaves fresh or dried in sauces.



**FRENCH CHIVES**  
The grasslike blades of Fine Leaf stay tender even after plants begin to bloom. Both stems and flowers taste like onions.

## garden | edibles

"Homegrown herbs are so easy in containers. Most people have a sunny spot for a pot on their deck or patio. The closer herbs are to the kitchen, the more you'll use them."

Renee Shepherd

