For thousands of years, people around the world have used herbs to treat and cure disease and to flavor food. Many common herbs such as thyme, oregano, and sage, have both medicinal and culinary uses.

Early herb gardens date to Europe in the Middle Ages when compendiums and texts describing how to prepare and administer herbs were first published. Herbs and spices were traded across the globe, often in exchange for gold and silver, and many of them made their way into our foods and gardens.

Other uses for these plants include fragrance, textiles, cosmetics, and household products.

As you explore the garden take note of the many and varied historical and modern uses of herbs.

“A man may esteem himself happy when that which is his food is also his medicine.”
Henry David Thoreau

Herbs Around the World

Herb Garden

A Guide to the Herb Garden

State Arboretum of Virginia at the University of Virginia's Blandy Experimental Farm
Common Herbs and Their Uses

**Rosemary**
Commonly used to season meats and fish. A symbol of remembrance.

**Lavender**
Known for its calming, soothing aroma. Often used in potpourris, lotions, and soaps.

**Thyme**
Essential oils are used to treat coughs and colds. Culinary uses are numerous.

**Parsley**
Commonly used in Mediterranean and Italian cuisine. Enhances other flavors.

**Oregano**
Best known as a seasoning in pizza and spaghetti sauce. Essential oil also used to treat sore throats and colds.

**Basil**
Main ingredient in pesto sauce. Excellent source of a variety of vitamins and minerals.

**Sage**
Best known as a flavoring for turkey and stuffing. Being studied as a possible treatment for Alzheimer’s disease.

**Dill**
Flavors fish, vinegars, soups, and of course pickles. Historically used to treat stomach ailments.

Most herbs are generally easy to grow, preferring full sun and well-drained soil. Herbs do well planted in gardens and containers.

Herb Garden History

The herb garden was established in 1972 to showcase plants with culinary, medicinal, and household uses. One of the oldest gardens at the arboretum and located across from the main parking area, it is intended to stimulate the senses and provide inspiration to home gardeners.

Sharing the Garden

Did you know some edible herbs are great habitats for butterflies, bees, and other beneficial insects? Black swallowtail caterpillars are frequent visitors. Their host plants include parsley, dill, and rue. To encourage these visitors, plant enough of these herbs for your table and theirs, and avoid using pesticides.

As you walk through the garden, please smell and touch the plants to enjoy their textures and aromas.