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SELECTION OF HERBS FOR THIS BOOK

The selection of herbs for inclusion in *Starting Out with Herbs* was an impossibly difficult task. I wanted to achieve a balance between being as comprehensive as possible and not overwhelming the reader with too many herbs which would defeat the object of a quick and easy to use introduction to herbs.

Margaret Roberts

May this book speed you on your busy way, but at the same time delight and inspire you to learn more about nature's little miracles, these precious herbs.





INTRODUCTION

I am appalled as the years go by, that fewer and fewer people really read books! The computer, the CD the DVD and the mp3 seem to be taking over and I can only weep for future children who may miss the joy and excitement of reading a real book. Even genuine book lovers seldom have time nowadays for a leisurely read. Bearing all this in mind my publishers and I decided to produce a quick-to-read, quick-to-grasp reference book. At a glance those who have to read on the run can find what they are looking for; from A to Z. There are no frills, no anecdotes—everything is to the point! My hope is that this book will give readers a taste for herbs, encouraging them to sit down and read my more detailed books later.

May this book speed you on your busy way, but at the same time delight and inspire you to learn more about nature's little miracles, these precious herbs.

Not all herbs could be included in this book. New herbs are constantly becoming available worldwide. When new plants are developed, trials and experimental recipes have to be worked through, the results logged and improvements made.

Starting Out with Herbs is a quick reference book telling you the basic culinary, medicinal and cosmetic uses of the most common (and my favourite) herbs as well as how and where to grow them. Most importantly it illustrates the herbs so that you can be sure to identify them correctly. If in doubt about the identification of a herb be sure to check with a nursery before you start using it.



**ALWAYS DISCUSS ANY HOME TREATMENT WITH YOUR
DOCTOR OR HOMEOPATH BEFORE YOU START USING IT**

AFRICAN MARIGOLD

Tagetes erecta

Family: Compositae



The marigold plants are characterised by their bright orange and yellow flowers and their ability to deter certain garden insects and worms. They are a happy and useful addition to any garden and grow without fuss in most gardens. They are indigenous to Mexico, despite their name, and the Aztecs used them extensively for medicinal and culinary purposes many centuries ago. They have now come back into favour, largely because of their amazing insect-repelling properties.

CULTIVATION

The African marigold is an annual plant.

Conditions: The plant likes sunny positions, and an average, well-drained soil. It's one of the most unfussy plants in cultivation!

Propagation: From seed. Sow seeds in trays or seedbeds in August and keep well watered. Prepare a bed that is dug deeply and well composted, with 3 to 4 spadefuls per square metre. Water well and plant out seedlings when they

are big enough to handle. Shade them by pressing a few leafy twigs around the seedlings for a few days. Keep moist until they become sturdy, then water once a week or more often if they wilt in the summer heat. Plant the smaller variety 20 to 30cm apart and the larger variety 60cm apart.

Containers: The African marigold can be grown in containers in full sun.

Size: 15 to 90cm, depending on type.

Harvesting: Use flowers and leaves all

through the summer for insect control. The more you pick the more they bloom.

Dos and don'ts: Marigolds make the perfect edging plants for vegetable gardens as they deter insect pests. They will, however, attract bees to the garden. Do grow them between rows of tomatoes; they seem to increase the fruit yield and will keep away flies. Grow all over the garden to keep it insect-free all summer long. I alternate a row of lettuce, a row of marigolds, a row of tomatoes, a row of basil, a row of radishes and a row of miniature marigolds for an insect-free feast—and a visual one, too.

USES

Domestic

- ✿ Marigolds dug into the soil before planting potatoes will deter roundworms. They are definitely worth planting as a soil-building crop.
- ✿ I feed a few marigold leaves and flowers to chickens to give their flesh

and egg yolk a good colour, but do so in moderation otherwise you may upset their digestion.

- ✿ Add dried marigold flowers and leaves to potpourris and insect repellent sachets. Khakibos, a close relative of the marigold, is also invaluable as an insect repellent and becomes pleasantly aromatic when dried. Dried khakibos plants should be saved for the compost heap as they rid it of unwanted egg-laying insects. Khakibos or khakiweed (*Tagetes minuta*) originated in South America, its oil is extracted for the perfume industry and exported all over the world. As it is one of the most useful of all insect repelling plants, it is a welcome weed everywhere.

Cosmetic

- ✿ Crushed marigold petals are used by several African tribes to clear up pimples.

BAY

Laurus nobilis

Family: Lauraceae



The bayleaf is widely used for culinary purposes and is so versatile that a bay tree should be a feature in every herb garden. The bayleaf has also been used medicinally for thousands of years, but its symbolic associations were even more significant than its practical uses. The bay tree was sacred to the Greek God Apollo. His temple at Adelpi had a roof made of bayleaves for it was believed they had a protective effect against evil influences and lightning.

The Romans thought very highly of the bay, and in fact it became a symbol of excellence. Athletes and poets were crowned with bay wreaths, and since then a laurel wreath has been regarded as a sign of honour. It is still used today to crown victorious sportsmen and outstanding symphony conductors. The plant's Latin name comes from the words 'laurus,' meaning 'laurel,' and 'nobilis,' meaning 'renowned.'

CULTIVATION

The bay tree is a perennial evergreen.

Conditions: The bay likes full sun, and should be sheltered from the wind. It grows well in an average, moist soil that is well drained.

Propagation: Take cuttings from the previous season's growth by pulling off a small 'heel' at the base of the stem. Dip into a rooting hormone. Plant the cuttings in boxes and keep them well watered in a cool place. You can

make a 'tent' for the boxes out of clear plastic, supported on wires so it is well clear of the plants. Allow the cuttings to harden off in the sun for a week or two before transplanting directly into the garden. Leave plenty of space between them as in frost-free areas bay trees grow very large.

Containers: It makes an ideal container plant, but the pot should be large as it does not like to be disturbed, and it must be in full sun.

Size: Reaches a height of 7m.

Harvesting: The leaves can be picked any time and used fresh or dried.

Dos and don'ts: If you live in a cold area the tree will need some winter protection.

USES

Domestic

- ✿ The leaves have been made into wreaths for thousands of years.
- ✿ A dried bayleaf sprig placed in flour and dried foods will keep weevils away.
- ✿ The leaves can be hung up in a room to keep the air fresh.

Cosmetic

- ✿ Add a decoction of the leaf to bathwater for a revitalising effect. It makes a superb footbath. Boil 2 cups of fresh leaves in 2/ of water for 15 minutes, then cool until pleasantly warm. Strain, and soak the feet in it for 15 minutes.

Medicinal

- ✿ An infusion of the leaf serves as an appetite stimulant and aid to digestion. Pour a cup of boiling water over one bayleaf, let it stand for 5 minutes and strain.
- ✿ The essential oil of bayleaf soothes sprains and rheumatic joints.
- ✿ The crushed berries, mixed with aqueous cream, make a soothing rub for sprains and bruises. They should not be eaten as they are poisonous.

Culinary

- ✿ The leaf is used in bouquets and to flavour savoury dishes such as casseroles, soups, marinades, sauces, stuffing, curries, etc. It imparts its flavour slowly over a long period, which is why it is so good in dishes that take a long time to cook. Always remove the leaf before serving, as it can become bitter.
- ✿ Add the leaf to custards and rice puddings for a subtle flavour. A few fresh leaves stored in rice will give it a pleasant taste.