

## ABOUT HERBS

The Shelton History Center Herb Garden has a variety of herbs that the Brownson family may have grown and used in the late 1800's and early 1900's. In addition to being used fresh, the leaves, seeds and roots of many herbs would have been dried for later use. Herbs were also preserved in vinegar or salt.

Herbs include annuals, biennials, and perennials. Annual herbs produce foliage, flowers, and seed in one growing season then die. Some annuals "self sow" meaning the seeds fall to the ground in the winter and sprout again in spring. Other seeds must be collected, stored over the winter and planted in the spring.



A few herbs are biennials which live two seasons; forming leaves in the first, flowers and seed in the second then dying.

Most herbs are perennials which live for years. Some perennial herbs like rosemary cannot tolerate the cold Connecticut winter and must be brought indoors in the fall.

**Caution: The medicinal uses cited here are not recommended today. Many herbs commonly used in the past have been found to be toxic or poisonous.**

<b>Basil</b> ( <i>Ocimum basilicum</i> )
An annual whose name means 'kingly herb', basil was used for flavoring foods and as a strewing herb. The dried leaves were used to relieve headaches and colds.
<b>Chives</b> ( <i>Allium schoenoprasum</i> ) <b>Garlic Chives</b> ( <i>Allium tuberosum</i> )
Chives are a perennial grown for their onion or garlic flavored leaves. In late spring chives produce attractive pink-lavender colored flowers that also are edible. Garlic chives have white flowers in late-summer. Both were used to flavor dishes as well as treat many ailments.
<b>Cilantro / Coriander</b> ( <i>Coriandrum sativum</i> )
Coriander is an annual whose leaves and ripe seeds have two distinct flavors. The seeds are sweet and aromatic; the leaves are pungent. Both seeds and leaves were used in cooking. The seeds were used to treat stomach ache and loss of appetite.
<b>Dill</b> ( <i>Anethum graveolens</i> )
Dill is an annual with a long history as a culinary and medicinal herb. In colonial times it was called the "meeting house seed" because people nibbled on the seeds to stop fidgeting during long meetings and sermons. The leaves as well as the flowers and seed were used in cooking and preserving vegetables like pickles.
<b>Lady's Leek</b> ( <i>Allium cernuum</i> )
A native wild onion, this perennial was eaten raw, cooked or dried for winter. It was used to treat colds, sore throat, and infections. The whole plant is said to repel insects and moles.
<b>Lady's Mantle</b> ( <i>Alchemilla vulgaris</i> )
Lady's mantle, a perennial, was used as a woman's healing herb. It contains salicylic acid (like aspirin) and had sedative properties that helped to alleviate cramps and painful menstruation. It was also viewed as one of the best wound herbs to prevent infection.

<b>Lamb's Ear</b> ( <i>Stachys officinales</i> )
Lamb's ear is a perennial valued for its anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties. It was used as a wound dressing and to help reduce the swelling of bee or wasp stings. Lamb's ear was also used to dye wool beige.
<b>Lavender</b> ( <i>Lavandula officialis</i> )
Lavender is a perennial with many uses. Dried lavender blossoms were used to freshen clothes, linens, rooms and repel insects like moths. It was known for its soothing, relaxing qualities. It was also used as a flavoring for many foods like desserts and tea.
<b>Lemon Balm</b> ( <i>Melissa officinalis</i> )
A perennial, lemon balm was used to make potpourri, teas and as a substitute for lemon in jams and jellies. Medicinally was used to treat digestive upsets, sleep problems, depression, itching from insect bites and muscle cramps.
<b>Mint</b> ( <i>Mentha sp.</i> )
A perennial cultivated for its medicinal value, mint was used to calm the nerves and stomach. It has numerous culinary uses in sauces, jellies, teas and drinks. Mint was used as a strewing herb, its smell repelling mice and insects.
<b>Oregano</b> ( <i>Origanum vulgare</i> )
A perennial, oregano was used to treat colds, coughs, and a variety of other conditions. It was also used to flavor foods, scent soaps and lotions as well as make dyes.
<b>Parsley</b> ( <i>Petroselinum crispum</i> )
A biennial with culinary and medicinal uses, parsley was used to mask the gamey taste from wild meats. It was also used in salads and soups. The boiled roots were used for ailments of the liver and viewed as a health tonic.
<b>Rosemary</b> ( <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> )
A perennial, rosemary was used to flavor foods and as a strewing herb. Medicinally, it was used in skin care, as a hair rinse, for sore throat, muscle and joint pain, wounds and bruises.

**Sage** (*Salvia officinalis*)

Sage is a perennial whose name means 'to heal'. Sage was a culinary favorite as well as an important medicinal. It was used to cleanse the body and reduce fevers. It was made into a tea sweetened with honey for a sore throat.

**Tarragon, French** (*Artemisia dracunculus*)

A perennial whose name means 'little dragon,' tarragon was grown for its licorice-anise tasting leaves and used in salads, sauces and vinegar. As a medicinal it was used to improve appetite, provide relief from the pain of rheumatism and flush worms from the body.

**Thyme** (*Thymus vulgaris*)

A perennial, thyme's aromatic leaves were used to flavor foods. Medicinally, it was thought to help with many maladies including worms and warts. In the home, it was used as a strewing herb to repel insects.

**Tree Onion** (*Allium x proliferum*)

The tree onion is a perennial that has a cluster of bulbs where a normal onion would have flowers. As the small bulbs grow top heavy, the stem bends over, allowing the bulbs to root giving rise to the name "walking onion". Young plants were eaten in the spring and the bulbs were used in cooking and pickling.

**Wormwood** (*Artemisia absinthium*)

Wormwood is a perennial with an aromatic odor and an exceedingly bitter taste. It was used as a restorative, digestive stimulant and to eliminate intestinal worms. It was also used as an insect repellent and insecticide.

**GROWING HERBS TODAY**

There are many reasons to add herbs to your garden. Herbs have nectar-rich flowers that attract many beneficial insects. Pollinators like butterflies and bees are attracted to the blossoms. And growing herbs among your vegetables and flowers may also help in pest and disease control.



The most important requirement for growing herbs is at least six hours of full sun a day. Many herbs will grow in poor soils and are tolerant of drought. Very few insects or diseases attack herbs and the deer don't like them either. Some herbs like mint can grow aggressively and be invasive and need to be planted separately or in pots.

For more information visit the Herb Society of America at [www.herbsociety.org](http://www.herbsociety.org).

The Herb Garden was created in the 1970's by the Olde Ripton Garden Club and continues to be maintained by club volunteers.  
[www.olderiptongardenclub.org](http://www.olderiptongardenclub.org)  
For more on the Shelton History Center visit [www.sheltonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.sheltonhistoricalsociety.org)

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**THE HERB GARDEN  
AT THE  
SHELTON HISTORY CENTER**

Throughout history herbs were a valued and essential part of a woman's kitchen garden. The settlers brought many of their favorite herbs from Europe but also added local herbs used by the Native Americans.

Culinary herbs were used in cooking and flavoring food. Leaves, flowers, seeds and roots were used to make teas; season cooked foods such as meats, vegetables, sauces, and soups; or flavor vinegars, butters, and mustards.

Fragrant herbs were used to scent clothes, linens, potpourris, sachets and candles. 'Strewing herbs,' were scattered on the floor to mask smells. Many of these aromatic herbs had the added benefit of repelling insects like ants, moths and mosquitoes as well as rodents.

Medicinal herbs were used to treat many common illnesses in people and animals. Herbs were even used to create dyes for cloth.

