

Home & Garden Television

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Herbs Indoors

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If you have herbs growing outdoors, you can successfully transfer them into an indoor environment for the winter.

Here, for example, is a clump of chives (**figure A**). Master gardener Paul James first digs and divides a portion of the chive clump for growing indoors while leaving the rest of the plant in the ground to over-winter and return next year. And the process, drastic as it may appear, is as simple as stabbing into a section of the plant with a sharp trowel or knife. Just be careful to get as many roots as possible when you remove the clump. Plant the chives in a container filled with potting mix (**figure B**). Before you place the container in a south- or west-facing window, there's one more step to consider. Chives, as well as mint, oregano, rosemary, sage and thyme, will rebound much faster if you remove up to two-thirds of their top growth before you put them indoors (**figure C**). If you don't have a south- or west-facing window, you can always grow herbs indoors under fluorescent lights.



Figure A

You can also take cuttings. This technique is best for perennial herbs such as marjoram, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon and thyme, and the ideal time of year to do it is at the end of the growing season. Just snip a six-inch section of stem and remove the lower leaves. Ideally, you should have six or eight sets of leaves above the cut. Place the cutting in a container (**figure D**) filled with perlite, coarse sand or a combination of the two. Water the plant well, and cover with a plastic bag to maintain humidity (**figure E**). Place the container in a cool, dimly lit area indoors. You don't need to dip herb cuttings in a rooting hormone because all herbs will root without it, and virtually all herbs will take root between three to six weeks, at which point you can go ahead and remove the humidity tent.



Figure B

The simplest way to grow herbs indoors, however, is from transplants, says James. "Transplants are virtually foolproof, and if you're lucky enough to find them this time of year at your local nursery, grab them."

You can grow herbs individually or group an assortment in one container. Since they'll be on display in the house, James suggests putting them in a pretty pot. Add a little potting mix to the container, and tease the roots a bit before placing the herb in the soil. Add more potting mix, and tamp it down firmly around the root ball. In a larger container, James groups different herbs such as rosemary, sage and oregano.



Figure C



Figure D



Figure E

"Shake things up a bit by combining three herbs, in this case, chives, parsley and thyme with a few veggie transplants including some mizuna and mustard (**figure F**)." And to sweeten the pot even more, James adds a small clump of violas (**figure G**). The flowers are gorgeous and edible.

Of course, you can always start a number of herbs from seed indoors--in particular, basil and dill--which germinate within a week.



Figure F

You might be disappointed, however, if you try to move large, container-grown herbs from the patio indoors--especially perennial herbs--because they simply don't adapt well to such an abrupt transition. "This large potted rosemary (**figure H**) looks great now," says James, "but it probably wouldn't last but a few weeks in the house." And of all the herbs that can be grown indoors, James says rosemary is arguably the most difficult. "That's not to say it can't be done, but you've got to baby it by giving it plenty of bright light, cool temperatures--ideally around 60 degrees--and high humidity, which may mean misting as much as three times a day." James leaves his large rosemary container outdoors and takes fresh snippets now and then to flavor whatever he needs as he needs it. "If the plant succumbs to a really hard freeze, I'll use the dried stems and toss them directly on the fire to flavor such dishes as grilled lamb, pork or fish."



Figure H

Aside from rosemary, most culinary herbs adapt well to the indoor environment during the winter months, provided they get bright light, regular watering and routine misting to maintain high humidity levels. Rotate the pots every few days so the herbs don't develop a lopsided look.

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