



The Herb Society of America's Essential Facts for Rosemary *Rosmarinus officinalis*



QUICK FACTS

Family: Lamiaceae (Labiatae)

Latin Name: *Rosmarinus officinalis*

Growth: evergreen perennial

Hardiness: zone 8-10

Light: full sun

Soil: well-drained, sand or gravel mix

Water: slightly moist, not too wet

Pests: thrips, spider mites, white fly

Diseases: root rot

Propagation: cuttings, layering, seeds
(species only)

Use: culinary, landscaping, crafts

History and Origin: Rosemary is native to the dry, rocky areas of the Mediterranean, especially along the coast. The genus name *Rosmarinus* derives from the Latin words *ros* and *marinus* which together translate to “dew of the sea.” Rosemary has been used since the time of the early Greeks and Romans. Greek scholars often wore a garland of the herb on their heads to help their memory during examinations. In the ninth century, Charlemagne insisted that the herb be grown in his royal gardens. The Eau de Cologne that Napoleon Bonaparte used was made with rosemary. The herb was also the subject of many poems and was mentioned in five of Shakespeare’s plays.

Myths and Folklore: A sprig of rosemary was often placed in the hands of the deceased at a funeral because it is a symbol of remembrance. Brides often wore rosemary at their weddings because it was also a symbol of happiness, loyalty and love. Legend has it that rosemary originally had white flowers which were changed to blue ones when the virgin Mary placed her cloak upon it while resting during her flight to Egypt.



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Cultivation: *Rosmarinus officinalis* does well if grown in pots or containers. Provide winter protection if the plant is left outside. This herb is especially susceptible to root rot if it is overwatered. Use a light, well-drained soil with some added sand or gravel and wait to water until the soil is slightly dry. Prune to encourage branching and to remove dead leaves and stems. Growing rosemary indoors can be challenging but it is well worth the effort. Indoor plants benefit from a sunny window in a cool room, well-draining soil, and regular misting.

How is rosemary used? *Rosmarinus officinalis* has a myriad of uses for the cook, crafter and landscaper. This strongly flavored herb should be used sparingly for cooking. Poultry, fish, lamb and beef are all enhanced by its pungent flavor. In addition, try it with tomatoes, cheese, eggs, potatoes, squash, soups and salad dressings. Well-developed woody stems can be used as skewers for shish kebobs. In the landscape, rosemary is often used to make to make topiaries and hedges. The herb can be planted along stone walls or pathways and it grows well in containers. Crafters use rosemary to make wreaths, garland, and bath products. The plant also produces a yellow-green colored dye and is used in aromatherapy.

How do I harvest Rosemary? Be sure to harvest only well-established rosemary plants. It is best to wait until any new growth has hardened off, usually in summer and early fall. Avoid harvesting while the plant is blooming. The prime time for harvesting rosemary for optimum flavor is just prior to flowering. Cut the stems above the woody growth and avoid dry, brown or yellowing leaves. If you plan to take your rosemary indoors for the winter, be sure to minimize your trimming during the fall to allow it to regain its strength for the winter. Keep in mind the desired shape of your plant as you harvest and avoid overpruning. Yellowing or dead branches can be removed at anytime.

What about drying and storage? Dry rosemary quickly to help retain its green color and essential oils. Longer stems can be hung upside down in a dark area with good air circulation. Smaller stems can be placed on screens. Rosemary can be frozen, although some loss of color may occur. To freeze, place the sprigs on a cookie sheet that has been covered with waxed paper or place in a ziploc® bag. Strip off the leaves when they are frozen and store in an airtight container. Leaves can also be placed in ice cube trays with some olive oil and stored in ziploc® bags after they are frozen.



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