Herb Gardening

“The smell of freshly washed sheets, the taste of fresh picked blueberries, and the sight of the first fresh-faced flowers in spring; fresh always seems so much better. Twice in the last week I have been in search of fresh basil for cooking, and twice I could not find it at the grocery store. Fresh herbs are a great addition to any meal and can make the difference between boring and brilliant. Growing your own herbs can be as easy as 1, 2, 3!

1. What – What herbs do you use most often in your home?
   From pasta sauces to casseroles fresh herbs can always be added. Basil, chives, marjoram, sage, and thyme are all great culinary herbs that you can grow quite easily. Bee balm, hyssop, mint, and yarrow are great for teas when you want to relax. Lavender makes wonderful smelling sachets and can help deter cats from your garden. Many salvia varieties are good choices for adding pops of color to your landscape. All of the aforementioned herbs are attractive to bees.

2. Where – Where should you plant your herbs?
   Finding the right location for your herb plants is crucial. Basil and salvia are both annuals and will need to be replanted, or reseeded, each year. Reseeding may happen naturally, or you might have to plant new plants. Chives, marjoram, sage, thyme, hyssop, bee balm, lavender, mint, and yarrow are perennials that will come back each year. Size varies from 6-inches to 4-feet in height and diameter. Most herbs require full sun, but some do well in part-sun/part-shade. Planting all of your herbs in one bed is great for accessibility, but incorporating them into your landscape adds texture, color, and interest. Light, size, and soil requirements should all be carefully considered when you locate plantings.

3. How – How much work does this plant require?
   For new plantings, watering in the mornings, mulch around the base, and a light fertilizer application is recommended. Once established, most herbs are perennials and require very little care. Fresh mulch around the base of the plant each spring and a light fertilizer application will usually get you through the year. In an exceptionally dry season, you may need to do some occasional watering. In order to control the size and encourage new vigorous growth, many perennial herbs should be cut back in the dormant season. Each plant is different, so do your research before cutting back everything.
Herb gardens can be very rewarding. With a little effort you can impress your friends in the garden and in the kitchen. So the next time you go hunting for basil, think about how easy it is to grow your own!

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me, Kerrie Roach, horticultural Extension agent, at North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at 910-671-3276 or by E-mail at Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu or visit North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center’s website at Robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.