

Herb Gardens for Dogs and People

Boost flavors and natural health with these grow-at-home herbs for dogs and people.

Tom Barthel

When planning your herb garden, go for maximum culinary impact. Wow your dinner party guests with savory classics and edible flowers. Find a sunny patch of well-drained soil or a couple of sturdy containers, then choose a few of these favorites that also offer benefits to your dog.

Calendula, called “pot marigold” although not related to true marigolds, produces brightly colored red, yellow, and orange blooms. The flower’s petals add a tangy, peppery taste to salads and other dishes, while setting plates ablaze with color. They also contain potent antioxidants that boost the immune system. Hardy calendula bloom all summer long, up until the first frost of the year.

To ease the pain of your dog’s minor skin irritations, rashes, or abrasions, make a mild tea from dried, chopped petals and spray on the affected area.

Peppermint, with its delicate lavender-white blossoms, is a great addition to any backyard herb garden. It pairs nicely with most summer dishes. From salads to dips and garnishes, peppermint adds the final touch to cooling foods. What could be better than a tall pitcher of refreshing iced peppermint tea on a hot summer day?

Ditto for dogs. Steep fresh peppermint in hot water for 10 to 12 minutes, chill, and offer it to your pooch as a stomach-settling elixir.

Lavender is a spectacular culinary herb with tremendous aromatic prowess, known to soothe, calm, and heal. It is one of the most versatile cooking herbs. Use it on meats, in salads, cookies, breads. Add it to dips, herb butters, and jams — even margaritas — to add a colorful, floral flavor to your favorite dish.

Lavender is equally versatile in the animal kingdom. A weak tea spritzed on your dog’s cuts, rashes, and abrasions can help soothe irritation and repel bugs. Sachets of dried lavender placed in the car, crate, or anywhere your dog experiences anxiety can have a calming, soothing effect on her mood.

Fennel adds a sweet, licorice flavor to foods. Its lacy, bushy foliage can be used, as well as its fleshy stalks and bright yellow blooms, with seafood dishes such as grilled fish and steamed mussels. The subtle, exotic flavor will leave dinner guests asking for the secret ingredient.

Chop the leaves and blooms, steep them into a mild tea, and offer the solution to your dog as a cool remedy. Fennel is thought to promote digestive health by relieving nausea and flatulence.

Chamomile is an age-old favorite for soothing the stress of the day, when dried and infused as a tea, these bright, daisy-like flowers provide a powerful calming affect. It can also combat stomach upset and insomnia. Before the harvest, they provide blankets of bright blooms — a stunning backdrop to any outdoor gathering.

Dogs benefit from this miracle plant’s powers, too. Make a tea, as you would for yourself, cool it, and offer it in your pet’s water bowl. If your dog seems reluctant to drink this or any other herbal infusion, try soaking her favorite treat in it.

Just remember that herbal remedies are not evaluated by the FDA for safety or effectiveness. The remedies suggested here were gathered from a sampling of veterinarians who have used these herbs to treat their patients, often to augment traditional therapies. Use caution when offering herbs to your pet. When in doubt, ask your veterinarian for dosage and application advice.

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