

A Guide to Herb Hardiness



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Plant hardiness is the lowest temperature that the plant can withstand during the winter. Various rating systems are used to describe it. We use the RHS rating system, and this is clearly indicated on all of the herbs on our website:

H	HARDY	hardy to -15°C;
FH	FROST HARDY	hardy to -5°C;
HH	HALF HARDY	hardy to 0°C
FT	FROST TENDER	not hardy below +5°C

Whichever rating you use, make sure you understand the code, as different systems use different values. Please remember, that hardiness rating is only a guideline to help you grow your herbs successfully.

Making sure that herbs survive the winter has many aspects.

Hardiness is just one of them. Some of the Mediterranean herbs, e.g. *Salvia officinalis*, even though fully hardy will struggle with the wetness of the typical English winter and might deteriorate due to excessive moisture.

Other elements affecting herbs' survival in the winter are:

- Condition and age of the plant (younger or weak plants, e.g. debilitated by pests or diseases will be much more sensitive to cold temperatures)
- Rainfall (flooding/drought)
- Soil type
- Wind exposure (in coastal areas salt content can be detrimental)
- Frost duration – prolonged frost is much more harmful than overnight

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Hardy annuals (e.g. *Borago officinalis*) can survive winter temperatures in a seedling stage. However, if you are sowing them out direct in the spring, wait until the soil warms up. If you are planting out from modules, make sure you harden the plants off beforehand.

Half hardy annuals (e.g. *Amaranthus tricolour*) will not survive the winter temperatures and will deteriorate at the first frosts in the autumn. They have to be raised in the glasshouse and planted out after the danger of late spring frosts has passed.

Frost tender annuals (e.g. *Ocimum basilicum*) and perennials (*Polygonum odoratum*) can be grown outside in warmer parts of the country; however their performance will deteriorate towards the end of summer. Frost tender perennials should be lifted and over wintered in a glasshouse.



Growing herbs in containers makes them more sensitive to the cold as the roots are exposed to air temperature fluctuations - the soil temperatures in comparison remain much more stable. Plastic pots are colder than terracotta but if you do use terracotta make sure it has drainage and is frost-proof.

Remember that a sheltered corner in the garden, by the wall of the house or a garage can offer quite a lot of winter protection. Use fleece, bubble wrap or even straw on frost hardy and half hardy shrubs if the temperatures plummet. Avoid bottoms of the slopes (frost pocket), and exposed verges where the sturdiness even of the hardiest plants could be tested.

