

Building an Herb Spiral



An *herb spiral* is a beautiful and easy way to incorporate a natural shape into your garden design while also providing microclimates for various species of herbs to thrive. An herb spiral can add dimension, beauty, and diversity to your yard. Its design saves space, provides insulation for the plants, and increases yields. To help you get started, the following is a step-by-step process for building and planting an herb spiral:

1. Gather materials.

You'll need these main components: Cardboard

Stacking material (bricks, stones, or cinder blocks)

Soil/compost/sand

You can put some pieces of rotten wood on the bottom layer.

2. Lay your base.

This spiral is about 6 feet in diameter. Lay out your cardboard to cover the space.

3. Outline your spiral.

Use your stones or other stacking material to outline the spiral, starting at the center and working your way outward.



Orient the spiral in the way water drains (clockwise in the Northern hemisphere). You want the outside edge/entrance at the bottom of the spiral to face north. When it comes time to plant, this will make it easier to organize plants based on their preferences for sun, heat, and water.

4. Start stacking.

To create the gradual increase in height, start at the outside edge of your spiral, skip over the first few stones, and then add a second row on top of your first base layer.

5. Continue adding rows.

Skip a few of the first stones of the previous row and then continue stacking until you are at the top of the spiral. If you are stacking correctly, the spiral will start to look like it's gradually increasing in height as it goes inward. Keep adding rows until you've reached the desired height.



6. Add any space fillers.

Depending on the height of your final row, the stability of the materials you are using, and the amount of soil you have on hand, you can add filler to the interior of the structure by putting old concrete pieces or other solid fill in the deepest part. This will minimize the amount of soil you'll need as well as reinforce the structure. The soil you add and the plant roots that will ultimately grow will also help keep the spiral sturdy.

7. Fill with the growing medium.

You'll need quite a bit of material to fill your spiral. We used a combination of soil from our garden and compost. You can mix some sand into the top for the Mediterranean herbs that prefer sandy soil.



Note: If you are using round stones or another material that isn't as easily stackable, you might find it easier to add soil as you build the spiral. Just fill with soil to the current height, add another layer of stones, add more soil, and so forth.

8. Plant.

To maximize the benefits of the spiral's unique micro-climates, plant from the top to the bottom as follows:

Top: Herbs that prefer the sunniest, warmest, and driest conditions. These include Mediterranean herbs requiring good drainage and full sun: rosemary, lavender, thyme, sage, oregano, tarragon, and lemon grass.

Middle: Herbs that prefer a bit more moisture and a bit more shade: basil, parsley, sorrel, borage, chives, chamomile, dill, and fennel. The south side will be warmer and sunnier, and the north will be cooler and shadier.

Bottom: Herbs that prefer the wettest part of the spiral: parsley and cilantro.