



Herculean Herbs

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Herbs that can survive cold, heat, drought, and indifferent care - those are Herculean indeed! These are also “Herculean” because many of them come to us from the lands where Hercules once roamed - the soaring hillsides and rugged coasts of the Mediterranean. Since most of these Herculean herbs have been cultivated for millennia, they tolerate a fair amount of indifferent care. Since they come from rocky, well-drained soils, with a long summer dry season, many are considered xeriscape plants.

These herbs grow well in Zones 7, 8, and 9, and can be used for food, flavor, gifts, and more. The actual number of Greek herbs is an elusive value because there are so many species, subspecies, landraces, and cultivars available. Some of the plants on this list are from the New World, but are also quite Herculean in nature.

Although they are tough, not every herb is ideal in every site, or with every gardener. We all kill plants! As a gardener it's important to remember "*If first you don't succeed, try, try again.*" So do try again, only perhaps with a different cultivar, or in a different area of your yard. Also remember that some of these herbs are naturally short-lived, lasting only three to five years in the wild, while others may survive for hundreds of years.

Herb care in general. Many herbs are seral species – by nature moving into recently disturbed and open areas. This means they generally require full sun. They also tend to need well-drained soil. Those that don't are noted.

aloe vera (*Aloe vera*), succulent, protect below 25^oF, full sun, part sun, indoors

bay laurel, sweet bay (*Laurus nobilis*), full sun, part sun, indoors

chamomile, Roman (*Chamaemelum nobile*)

[not the annual German Chamomile (*Matricaria rectita*)]

garlic chives (*Alium tuberosum*), part sun ok

germander, wall (*Teucrium chamaedrys*)

germander, water (*Teucrium scordium*), needs moist soils

golden marguerite (*Anthemis tinctoria*)

Jerusalem sage (*Phlomis fruticosa*), shade to part sun

juniper (*Juniperus communis*), shade, part sun, full sun

lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), part sun ok

marjoram, sweet marjoram (*Origanum majorana*), part sun ok

mint (*Mentha* species), for moist areas, keep contained, part sun ok

mountain ash (*Sorbus* species)

Oregon grape (*Mahonia* species)

oregano (*Origanum vulgare*) – many to select from

Origanum vulgare hirtum – Adriatic oregano, Italian oregano, Greek oregano

Origanum vulgare onites – Cretan oregano, pot marjoram

Origanum 'Aureum' – golden oregano

'Greek,' 'Kaliteri,' 'Hot & Spicy,' 'Nana,' are named cultivars of *Origanum vulgare hirtum*

'Italian,' 'Sicilian' oregano are hybrids between oregano and marjoram

oxalis (*Oxalis* species) 550 species - some weedy, some indoors

rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), full sun, part sun ok, indoors

sage, garden sage, common sage (*Salvia officinalis*), part sun for non-variegated species ok

'Purpurascens', a purple-leafed cultivar

'Tricolor', a cultivar with white, yellow and green variegated leaves

'Berggarten', a cultivar with large leaves

'Icterina', a cultivar with yellow-green variegated leaves

'Alba', a white-flowered cultivar

'Extrakta', has leaves with higher oil concentrations

'Lavandulaefolia', a small leaved cultivar

sage, Greek (*Salvia fruticosa*), 50–95% of the dried sage sold in North America

savory (*Satureja* species), part sun ok

summer (*Satureja hortensis*)

winter (*Satureja montana*)

sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), for moist areas

thyme (*Thymus* species), part sun ok for non-variegated species

common or culinary thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)

creeping thyme (*Thymus praecox*)

lemon thyme (*Thymus X citriodorus*)

golden lemon thyme (*Thymus X citriodorus* 'Aureus')

mother-of-thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*)

woolly thyme (*Thymus pseudolanuginosus*)

wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)

yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)



Jacqueline A. Soule is an award-winning garden writer. She has 12 published books, and she blogs, teaches classes, and has been a popular columnist for many years with weekly and monthly columns in a number of national, regional and local publications. Jacqueline has a Ph.D., but she doesn't flaunt her education, a trait that makes her popular with landscape professionals and garden clubs alike.

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