

MAKING LIFE MORE FUN

Herbs: Spicing Up Gardens Across America

(NAPSA)—Herb gardens are growing in popularity, and for good reason. In addition to their obvious role in cooking, they are easy to grow and maintain, and they add color, interesting textures and rich or subtle fragrances to the home and garden.

According to Charlie Nardozzi, senior horticulturist for the National Gardening Association (NGA), more than 15 million households in the United States grow herbs, and money spent on herb gardening has nearly doubled over the last five years. In 2004 alone, gardeners spent \$367 million growing herbs.

In his role as Chief Gardening Officer consultant for Hilton Garden Inn®, Nardozzi leads young students in gardening exercises as part of the hotel brand's nationwide "Grow A School Garden" program. Whether herbs are planted in containers or in an outdoor garden, kids enjoy the hands-on experience of gardening, making it a great activity for the entire family to enjoy—from planting the seeds, to watering the plants, to harvesting the herbs and vegetables.

"Kids have a natural curiosity about how things grow and where things come from. In fact, many kids don't really realize vegetables



and herbs are grown in the ground and not in grocery stores!" says Nardozzi. "Gardening teaches children valuable lessons about the food cycle, plus skills such as cooperation, patience, persistence and responsibility."

Nardozzi offers the following tips on how your family can grow a successful herb garden:

- Plant herbs where you can get to them easily for frequent harvesting, especially if you plan to use them in cooking. Consider planting a special kitchen garden near the house, so you can readily harvest herbs, greens and other frequently-used crops. You also can grow herbs in containers or even window boxes.

- Most herbs prefer full sun—at least six hours per day—and well-drained soil.

- Herbs that will tolerate some light shade include chives, cilantro, dill and mint.

- If you plant perennial herbs—such as oregano, rosemary and sage—in the vegetable garden, keep them in a separate section so you'll avoid tilling them during spring and fall.

- Most herbs will thrive on about an inch of water a week, similar to other vegetable plants.

- Herbs in raised beds and containers will dry out more quickly than those planted directly in the garden and may need more frequent watering.

- Keep garden beds weeded, especially early in the season as plants are getting established.

- Harvest herbs by cutting back a shoot to just above a leaf. This will both provide you with a harvest and encourage nice, bushy growth.

- In general, an herb's flavor is most pronounced when it is harvested just before the plant begins to flower. Herbs also are best harvested in the morning when they have the most oil in their leaves.

For more information on gardening and 2005 trends, visit www.garden.org and to find out more about the "Grow A School Garden" program, visit www.hiltongardeninn.com.