

Ask a Master Gardener

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Rosemary

Q. I am interested in herbs. Can you tell me about Rosemary and its adaptability to our growing region?

A. Rosemary, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, is an herb and native to the rocky dry areas of the Mediterranean, especially along its rocky seacoast. The genus name, *Rosmarinus*, translates as “dew of the sea.” Historically, it was a symbol of remembrance. It was used by brides in bouquets and in hair adornments as a symbol of love, loyalty and happiness. It is said that Napoleon wore cologne made of rosemary oil. It is used by cooks, crafters and landscapers.

Rosemary is in the mint family and is known for its pungent flavor and aroma. Cooks use it to enhance the flavor of many meats and vegetables. It is one herb that is more potent fresh than dried, so a little of it goes a long way. Potatoes tossed in olive oil and roasted in the oven with sprigs of rosemary is one of my favorite rosemary-flavored dishes. Use its woody stems for shish kabobs and the stem will flavor the food as it cooks. Flowers may be sprinkled into salads, mixed into butter or cream cheese to use on crackers, and crystallized to decorate cakes and cookies.

In the landscape rosemary is used for topiaries and in does well in containers. It may be used in the herb garden, scent garden, or in the vegetable garden if space is available.

Crafters use rosemary for wreaths, garlands, and in potpourri. You may have seen it pruned into the shape of “tree” at Christmas and planted in a small pot. If you receive it as a gift, you may decide to plant it outside in the spring after danger of frost has passed. Keep it in bright light if kept indoors.

Rosemary is a perennial and evergreen. It can be an upright, slow-growing shrub of 4-6 feet tall and wide. There also are spreading types that have downward growth (prostrate) and seldom get over 3 feet tall and wide. The stems of both become woody overtime. Depending on the cultivar, flowers are white, lavender or blue. Rosemary blooms repeatedly after a winter when the temperatures dip to around 38 degrees F. to set buds. Plants need full sun (at least 6 hours) and they need good drainage. If container grown, be sure to give winter protection and do not overwater. In the ground rosemary stands up to drought once established and does well in raised beds. Deer do not like its pungency and seem to stay away from it.

According to Walter Reeves, ‘Athens Gem’, ‘Athens Blue Spires’, ‘Arp’, and ‘Hill’s Hardy’ may withstand cold weather better than the common types. ‘Prostrata’ is a creeping type which may be used for edging at a wall or in a scent garden. If your rosemary suf-

fers from extreme freeze, prune the damaged stems severely. New growth can grow from the undamaged roots.

You may propagate rosemary from tip cuttings 4 to 6 inches long. Strip the lower leaves from the stem and dip the cut end in a rooting hormone to encourage better root development. Put the cuttings into a soil that is light and drains well. Keep cuttings moist but not soggy until the rooting structure is strong. Warmth and good circulation are also important during this time. Plant the new rootings in larger pots and water lightly. Once established cut back on the watering as rosemary prefers hot temperatures and dry soil. Cuttings may be put into the ground once the plant is fully rooted.

If you are a cook, crafter, or are interested in planting an herb garden rosemary is a great choice for you. If you have gardening questions, contact a Master Gardener Volunteer at the UGA Cooperative Extension Carroll County office at 900 Newnan Road, Carrollton at 770-836-8546 or via email at ccmg@uga.edu.