

Episode 123 show notes and advice

Episode description

This week, Sarah is joined by organic gardening expert, author, broadcaster, and herb enthusiast, Jekka McVicar. The pair take time to discuss Jekka's 12 best beginner-friendly herbs to start your own kitchen garden, along with helpful hints and tips and some delicious recipes.

In this episode, discover:

- ❖ Why combining herbs as a 'cocktail' intensifies flavour
- ❖ Cultivation techniques for high-quality herbs
- ❖ Delicious recipes to try at home

episode 123 advice sheet

Great for those with balconies or small gardens, these are the top 12 herbs Jekka recommends for beginners, who want to enhance the flavour profile of their food. Instead of using it in isolation, Jekka recommends combining herbs for a cocktail of flavour. It's all about finding interesting and delicious combinations that have the capacity to transform a meal in seconds.

Dill and coriander (2:47)

separately or together, this combination of herbs is one of Jekka's absolute favourites. She explains that the lightness of the dill contrasts really well with the weightiness of the coriander, and both can be grown in the smallest spaces. Even if you don't have a balcony, these can be grown on the windowsill and used as cress or micro herbs for adding an instant hit of flavour to homemade dishes.

Jekka suggests parsley in addition too. The magic combination with flavours of the East goes so well with rice, pasta, vegetables, and salads.

Dill seed is a lovely accompaniment to courgette.

Spearmint (4:20)

Good quality spearmint also makes a delicious addition. Jekka explains that the key to success is keeping it in a pot, separate from the rest of your herbs as it does have the tendency to take over and spread.

Jekka likes to combine the four herbs above and blend them with feta to create a delicious dip. Similarly, she suggests making a basic houmous and adding these herbs to intensify the flavour. The mint is a great choice for taking the edge off the other flavours.

French tarragon (5:09)

Serving as the very beginning of Jekka's adventure with herbs, and as an important family favourite, French Tarragon is a herb that Jekka simply couldn't live without.

Tarragon has an aniseed flavour, which makes your tongue zing when you eat it. Jekka warns to watch out as a lot of people are selling Russian tarragon as French tarragon, which isn't nearly as nice. She suggests trying a leaf to check that it's the right variety, a common practice in Europe.

Jekka loves to use French tarragon to stuff a chicken along with a lemon, which creates a really intense and aromatic flavour.

It also works really nicely with tomatoes. Chop the tarragon finely and incorporate into butter then add it to grilled tomatoes. Serve it with a nice piece of toast for maximum flavour.

Rosmarinus officinalis 'Green Ginger' (7:05)

Another must-have herb for Jekka. This rosemary is not only delicious, but is an incredible spin on traditional rosemary. Jekka says that in recent studies rosemary has been linked to improving people's memories and is great for those who suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder as it helps to lift low mood.

Superb for adding to cocktails, Jekka also suggests making a 'shrub', which is a fruit or herb-based syrup that's great for adding to drinks or cooking.

Jekka's basic shrub recipe

- ❖ Marinate or soak the rosemary and raspberries in white wine vinegar for at least 48 hours.
- ❖ Next, take a potato masher and incorporate the ingredients and then strain it through a coffee filter.
- ❖ Add sugar to sweeten the mixture. Jekka doesn't like her shrub to be too sweet, so if you have 50 ml of liquid in the first place, only add 35-40 grams of sugar.
- ❖ Add the liquid to the pan and bring to a simmer until all the sugar is dissolved.

This works as a wonderful basis for dressings and drinks, it is also delicious over vanilla ice cream for dessert.

Garlic chives (9:33)

Super delicious and easy to grow from seed. Garlic chives are an elevated version of standard chives and are super tasty. Usually, these need 18 degrees to germinate well, so now is the perfect time to start sowing outdoors.

From China, they produce star-shaped flowers in July, similar to wild garlic, but much sweeter. Chop up, add to butter, and spread over a jacket potato for a brilliant topping. The flowers also make a great addition to salads.

Thai basil (10:16)

Versatile with a slight taste of aniseed, Thai basil is really delicious. It's also first cousins with mint, which means if you stop and taste sweet or Greek basil, it gives the same aromatic punch as mint. Another cousin is sweet marjoram.

Jekka likes to add Thai basil just before she serves, as supposed to cooking it.

Why not make an infusion? Boil water, add the herbs to infuse, and freeze in an ice cube tray. Lovely for adding to your favourite cocktails.

Sweet marjoram (11:32)

Another name for classic oregano, Jekka now grows a perennial version, which she says is absolutely delicious. First brought to the UK as a snuff for gentlemen and as part of a tussie-mussie or posy for women to carry around in the 16th Century.

It's great alongside tomatoes (almost beating basil!) – Jekka simply chops through butter and adds to tomatoes. If you take a glut of tomatoes and slow roast, add some sweet marjoram for a greater depth of flavour. It's also a key ingredient for pizza.

Top tip – Jekka says when sowing basil seeds, don't use your hands. Our hands are often warm and wet when sowing seeds, and if the seeds are placed back in the packet, they will go rancid and die. Instead, fold your seed packet in half, and use it as a dibber.

Jekka suggests watering in the morning instead of at night, as herbs often complain when they have a soggy bottom!

Lemon thyme (13:46)

Another great addition to any herb garden, it's so versatile and goes well with fish, chicken, roast vegetables, ratatouille, and much much more.

Not only does it have a richer and more lemony flavour than traditional thyme, but it's also really easy to grow, although you can't get it from seed.

Buckler Leaf (14:28)

Tremendously tasty and reminiscent of Granny Smith apples, it is a worthy addition to any salad. Jekka likes to pick a handful and add it to a blender with crème fraiche and serve with cold salmon or cold chicken, rice, or vegetables. Super refreshing and really very delicious.

Salvia lavandulifolia (15:26)

Jekka loves *Salvia lavandulifolia*, which is great to cook with. Super small, fragrant leaves complement rice, courgette, or tomatoes.

Jekka's HerbFest 2023

Jekka's HerbFest will be returning this year and is a celebration of the growing and use of herbs. You can expect talks, gardening workshops, cookery demonstrations, and more!

To find out more about Jekka's family-run herb farm visit here: www.jekkas.com