



Brainerd Dispatch/Steve Kohls
Sharon Wetteland, Lake Shore, chopped up onions and celery for a recipe during a herb class last week at the Northland Arboretum.

Planting the seed

Now is the time to start thinking about herbs

By **JENNIFER STOCKINGER**
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Cold temperatures and snow-covered land are not good indicators if you're thinking about growing herbs.

In the Brainerd lakes area, the ground is frozen and people are getting cabin fever. But spring will be here before you know it, and last week, about 30 people gathered at the Northland Arboretum for a class on "Growing and Cooking with Herbs."

Crow Wing County master gardener Orv Hastad discussed growing and harvesting herbs. Hastad has been a master gardener for seven years and has been growing herbs organically for more than 20 years.

Hastad said salt and pepper are not enough seasoning when preparing food. Hastad said there are many flavors and varieties of herbs people can grow to give their food a

wonderful taste.
 "You can go to the grocery store to buy herbs, but



Brainerd Dispatch/Steve Kohls
Fresh herbs from Sharon Wetteland's herb garden.



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Sharon Wetteland, Lake Shore, who has more than 10 years of experience as a professional chef and taught classes at Chef and Company and for other corporations, chopped onions and celery for a recipe during a herb class last week at the Northland Arboretum.

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the Northland Arboretum.



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HERBS / Short season a challenge

they can get expensive," Hastad said. "And you don't know what you're getting. When I use my own herbs, I know where they come from and how fresh it is."

Hastad said growing herbs can be a challenge in the lakes area because the season is so short. Hastad said herbs need to grow in warm weather and the ground also needs to be warm (except for parsley and chives).

"You can have a 70-degree day in the spring, but the ground could be 40 degrees," Hastad said. "The ground temperature should be at least 65 degrees to begin growing most herbs. Many times I wait to transplant the seedlings until June 15."

Hastad said people can grow herbs from seeds, but he doesn't recommend it.

"It's not worth the hassle," he said. "You could buy a starter plant from the nursery or by mail and grow it from there."

"Once you have a small plant, growing herbs is simple. Herbs are wild by nature and it doesn't take rocket science to grow. Herbs will thrive in the right conditions. Just give them room to breathe."

Hastad said herbs need the right amount of moisture and soil and plenty of sunlight to grow. Hastad said that, when growing herbs in sandy soil, a small amount of compost should be added for the herbs to grow effectively. Herbs also should be protected from the wind if possible and herbs don't tolerate the frost.

Hastad said that if growers decide to fertilize their herbs, they should only use a fourth of the recommended strength and fertilize only once a week, or even once a month, depending on the herb.

Hastad recommended using a wide-raised bed in growing herbs. Hastad said this makes it easier for the grower to pick the herbs and allows for more room for the herbs to grow.

Sharon Wetteland, Lake Shore, who has more than 10 years of experience as a professional chef and taught classes at Chef and Company and for various corporations, also served as an instructor at the herb class. Wetteland discussed the difference between cooking with fresh and dried herbs and she prepared four dishes using herbs: Pesto tortellini, pork skewers braised in lemon sage cream, thyme-scented rice pilaf and baby carrots with honey and dill.

Wetteland said people should use less dried herbs than fresh herbs when they cook. Wetteland said dried herbs have a more concentrated flavor than fresh. Wetteland also said that when people cook with spices and herbs, they should start with a little and add more as needed.

"You can always add more, but you can't take away," Wetteland said. "Add a little at a time if you are unsure of the result and taste as you cook."

Wetteland said there are a variety of different salts, and she recommends using Kosher salt.

Hastad said there are numerous varieties of basil and thyme and many others herbs to choose from. He said most of the nurseries and farmers' markets carry good starter plants for people to purchase to start their herb garden. Hastad said mail-order plants are another good option.

So once the sun comes out and you want to grow herbs, make sure you have the seeds or the plant to start your garden.