

Rosemary has a long and detailed history

Question: What can you tell me about growing rosemary in the Umpqua Valley?

Answer: *Salvia rosmarinus* (formerly *Rosmarinus officinalis*), commonly known as rosemary, is a shrub with fragrant, evergreen, needle-like leaves.

It produces clusters of small, light blue or pink to white flowers typically in the late spring to early summer, though it can bloom at other times of the year as well.

It is a member of the mint family, Lamiaceae, which includes many other medicinal and culinary herbs. The name rosemary has nothing to do with the rose or the name Mary, but the species name “*rosmarinus*” derives from the Latin name “*ros marinus*”, which literally means “dew of the sea.”

Rosemary is native to the dry, rocky areas along the Mediterranean coast.

Rosemary is known as



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the herb of remembrance. Cultivated for over 5,000 years, the rosemary plant history is understandably steeped in legend, myth and folklore.

Pharaohs were buried with the herb in ancient Egypt. In ancient Greece, students believed rosemary would improve their memory, so they wore rosemary garlands while taking exams. Rosemary also became a symbol for happiness, love and fidelity, and friendship. Branches tied in colorful ribbons were given as New Year's gifts, wedding gifts, as well as carried by mourners to throw onto coffins as they were lowered into the ground at funerals.

Plant rosemary in the spring after any threat of frost has passed. The shrub has a moderate growth rate. It will reach its mature size and begin flowering in its second season.

Rosemary can be grown in pots or in an herb garden. The prostrate forms are attractive in hanging baskets or as a ground cover. Rosemary can also be trimmed into interesting topiary shapes. The tall upright forms make a great hedge or screen.

Rosemary shrubs attract bees and other pollinators to the garden.

This plant needs a sunny spot with well-drained loamy soil. A slightly acidic to neutral soil pH is ideal. It doesn't tolerate heavy clay or wet soils well.

Rosemary shrubs have good drought tolerance once they are mature, and it's better to underwater rather than overwater them. Allow the top few inches of soil to dry out between waterings, and

then water so that the soil is evenly moist but not soggy.

Rosemary is not a heavy feeder. Mixing compost into the soil at the time of planting can help to give the shrub a healthy start. Then, using a balanced liquid fertilizer, following label instructions, will continue to promote quality growth.

Growing rosemary in a container allows you can keep it on a patio or deck near your kitchen for easy access while cooking. An unglazed clay container is best to allow excess soil moisture to evaporate through its walls.

There are several varieties of rosemary to choose from, including:

■ **Arp:** This plant has grey-green foliage with a lemony scent, and it's known for its cold tolerance. Arp is about as hardy as rosemary gets. This means savory, fresh rosemary all year long. Arp has pale blue flowers

that bloom mid-summer to fall. Reaching 4 feet tall, Arp makes a great border or hedge.

■ **Foxtail:** This dramatic variety has fine foliage that grows densely into an incredibly beautiful plume habit. It is great for pots and hanging baskets. This edible ornamental produces a lot of foliage for cooking and looks stunning too.

■ **Huntington Carpet:** This cultivar has a low, spreading growth habit at around 2 feet high and 2 to 3 feet wide and makes a great low maintenance ground cover.

Prune rosemary as necessary to shape its growth after the plant is done flowering. But don't prune off more than a third of the plant at a time, as this can stress the shrub and leave it vulnerable to diseases and pests. Rosemary is easily pruned into shapes and has been used for topiary.

If you would like to propagate your own rosemary

plant, the best option is to start with a cutting. Not only is this an inexpensive way to get a new plant, but taking cuttings from a mature plant can help to promote more branching and bushier growth. The best time to take a cutting is in the spring or summer. You can also buy rosemary plants at your local garden nursery.

Rosemary is just the herb to use with roasted squash or potatoes. If you bake, you'll easily get into the habit of making those delectable no-knead breads with a lacing of chopped rosemary, or a shortbread cookie with rosemary and sea salt. Rosemary can also be used to season a compote of citrus fruit or lemon bars. Yumm!

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461.