

Rosemary Fact Sheet

Rosemary is a woody perennial herb with fragrant evergreen needle like leaves. It's a native of the Mediterranean region and is part of the large mint or Lamiaceae family which also includes many other herbs.

As well as its popular culinary uses, rosemary is often grown as a hedging plant. It loves a hot dry climate. It grows in a range of well drained and slightly alkaline soils. The ancient Greeks used to say that rosemary helped memory, and in Australia signifies remembrance - particularly on Anzac Day.

Rosmarinus officinalis is the original species and grows to a height of about a metre and a half. During summer it becomes smothered in long spikes of pale mauve flowers.

Some other rosemaries to look out for include:

The blue flowered 'Gorza' - the one the chefs use in cooking and as skewers. Just de leaf the stalk, sharpen the ends and then load your tasty morsels onto the skewer for great barbecues.

A prostrate grower called 'Huntingdon Carpet' only reaches about 25 centimetres, but is still covered in beautiful blue flowers and looks great when planted so it tumbles over rocks, a wall or looks good in a hanging basket. It really is a stunning plant.

'Salem' is a rosemary that came to Australia from Auckland, New Zealand. It's an upright grower, attains a height of just under a couple of metres, with a width of about a metre, and makes a great hedging plant with spikes of deep blue flowers through summer.

'Pink Remembrance' has pink flowers instead of blue, but otherwise has the same characteristics of the other rosemaries and grows to a height of a couple of metres.

Generally the smaller the leaf the more drought-tolerant the plant, and that's true of rosemary. Because it is drought-tolerant, it's often used as a landscaping plant, especially in Mediterranean climates.

The Queensland climate, with a hot humid summer, can be harsh on the rosemary, so make sure it's in a well-drained soil. Don't over-water it because the roots are sitting in warm moist soil and that's a perfect environment for the root disease, *Phytophthora*. And prune them back just before summer, to open up the plant and minimise disease.

The good thing about pruning is that you can use the prunings as cuttings. Rosemaries grow from cuttings easily and also from seed - some of the newer cultivars even produce viable seeds.

Propagating from cuttings is pretty easy. Just strip off the bottom leaves. Remember, the gritty feel of the potting mix can damage the tip, or rooting end, of the cutting. This means it won't form roots easily and so it's important to make a little hole in the potting mix first, pop the cutting in, and then firm the potting mix down.

Rosemaries love soil with a high pH, so add dolomite at least once or twice a year. If you live in a hot humid climate then dust the whole plant with dolomite, because that works wonders and helps minimise disease.

The ancient Greeks were obviously on the money with this herb and nowadays it's recognised by modern-day practitioners of aromatherapy as an aid to mental clarity. Rosemary is also dried and used in potpourri, the oil can be found in many perfumes and cosmetics - and there's nothing better than throwing it in with the roast lamb.