

All About Fresh Herbs



rosemary



sage



thyme

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Cooking with Fresh Herbs

Here are some hints as you explore what's best for you:

When Substituting Fresh Herbs for Dried Herbs

A general guideline when using fresh herbs in a recipe is to use three times as much as you would use of a dried herb. When substituting, you'll often be more successful substituting fresh herbs for dried herbs, rather than the other way around.

When to Pick or Purchase Herbs

Purchase herbs close to the time you plan to use them. When growing herbs in your own garden the ideal time for picking is in the morning after the dew has dried but before the sun gets hot. This helps ensure the best flavor and storage quality.

How to Store Herbs

Fresh herbs can be stored in an open or a perforated plastic bag in your refrigerator crisper drawer for a few days. If you don't have access to commercial perforated bags, use a sharp object to make several small holes in a regular plastic bag.

To extend the freshness of herbs, snip off the ends of the stems on the diagonal. Place herbs in a tall glass with an inch of water, like cut flowers. Cover them loosely with a plastic bag to allow for air circulation. Place them in the refrigerator and change the water daily. Herbs may last a week or more stored this way, but be aware: the flavor of herbs may diminish the longer they're stored.

If you have more herbs than you can eat, place herbal bouquets throughout your house. You can use either single herbs, combinations of herbs or you can use the herbs as greenery mixed in with other flowers. To help preserve the aroma and color of your herb bouquets, place them out of direct sunlight.

How to Wash Herbs

Wash herbs when you are ready to use them. Wash smaller amounts of herbs thoroughly under running water. Shake off moisture or spin dry in a salad spinner. Pat off any remaining moisture with clean paper towels.

If you're washing a larger amount of herbs, treat them as you would salad greens. Place in a clean sink or deep bowl filled with cold water and swish around. Lift from the water and transfer to another bowl so dirt and grit remain in the water. Pour out the water and repeat the washing process in clean water until dirt and grit are gone and the water is clear.

How to Prepare Herbs for Cooking

For most recipes, unless otherwise directed, mince herbs into tiny pieces. Chop with a chef's knife on a cutting board or snip with a kitchen scissors. To speed cutting with a scissors, cut



basil



cilantro

herbs coarsely into a small bowl or cup and snip back and forth with your scissors. Some recipes may direct you to cut large leaves, such as basil, "chiffonnade-style" or into thin strips. An easy way to do this is to stack several leaves (about 3 to 5), roll into a tight roll, then cut into thin (1/16 to 1/8 inch) strips with a sharp knife.

While some recipes call for a sprig or sprigs of herbs, normally the part of the herb you harvest will be the leaves. For herbs with sturdier stems, such as marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage and thyme, you can strip off the leaves by running your fingers down the stem from top to bottom. With small-leaved plants such as thyme, you can use both leaves and stems for cooking early in the season. Later in the season, as the stems become tougher, use just the leaves.

For herbs with tender stems, such as parsley and cilantro, it's OK if you snip some of the stem in with the leaves when you're cutting these herbs. Be careful if using a food processor to cut herbs – it's easy to turn them to a paste rather than tiny pieces.

When to Add Herbs During Food Preparation

Unlike dried herbs, fresh herbs are usually added toward the end in cooked dishes to preserve their flavor. Add delicate herbs, such as basil, chives, cilantro, dill leaves, parsley, marjoram and mint, a minute or two before the end of cooking or sprinkle them on the food before it's served. The less delicate herbs, such as dill seeds, oregano, rosemary, tarragon and thyme, can be added about the last 20 minutes of cooking. Fresh herbs can be added to refrigerated cold foods several hours before serving. Allowing time (at least a couple of hours, if possible) for cold foods with herbs to chill helps the flavors to blend.

Freezing Herbs

Recommendations vary on the best way to freeze herbs, how long frozen herbs will maintain a satisfactory flavor and which herbs will freeze well. Be aware that when herbs are frozen, they become limp, lose their color and are best used in cooked foods. The most conservative guidelines for how long herbs will maintain their quality frozen range from two to six months. Here are three possible ways to freeze herbs:

- 1) Wash, drain and pat dry with paper towels. Wrap a few sprigs or leaves in freezer wrap and place in a freezer bag. Seal and freeze. These can be chopped and used in cooked dishes. These usually are not suitable for garnish, as the frozen product becomes limp when it thaws."
- 2) After washing herbs, cutting them into tiny pieces and then filling the sections of an ice cube tray about half full with herbs. Cover herbs with cold water and freeze until solid. Transfer frozen cubes to a freezer bag and squish out as much air as possible. Drop them into soups, stews and sauces as needed. Be aware herbs may stain plastic ice cube trays.
- 3) After chopping herbs into tiny pieces, you might try making a "slurry." Simply puree your washed herbs in a blender with a small amount of water. Pour into ice cube trays and freeze until solid. Transfer to a freezer bag and add to foods, as desired.



oregano

How To Use Our Favorite Holiday Herbs

Thyme

- * Strip some leaves from the stems and drop into mushrooms while they sauté,. Maybe a tablespoon per pound of mushrooms.
- * Chop thyme and add to flour for dredging chicken for frying. A tablespoon per cup of flour.
- * Sauté, three tablespoons thyme leaves in two tablespoons butter to pour over Brussels sprouts, green beans or egg noodles.
- * Add a teaspoon of thyme leaves per cup of clam chowder just before service.
- * Add three or four tablespoons of thyme leaves to two cups of hot chicken broth. Remove from the heat, cover and let steep for 1 hour. Strain and chill. Use that broth to add to the water to cook rice and pasta. Mix 1/2 cup vinegar, a cup of the broth and 1/2 cup oil for a low-fat salad dressing. Shake or whisk and pour over salads. Refrigerated, it will hold for a week.
- * Add the leaves from a good-sized sprig of thyme to beans while they simmer - about 15 minutes from the end of cooking. Pick up some beans on a spoon and blow on them. If the skin breaks open, that's the time to add the herbs. The beans are within minutes of being done.

Sage

- * Alternate sage leaves with cubes of meat and vegetables on skewers when making shish-kabobs.
- * Heat 1/2 stick of butter in a skillet and add two tablespoons chopped sage and toss to cover. Warm through and serve over pasta or mixed into rice.
- * Slide a few sprigs of sage under the skin of chickens and turkeys top be roasted. Put a few in the cavity, as well.
- * Combine two tablespoons chopped sage with 8-ounces of cream cheese and three or four tablespoons white wine as a light spread or dip.
- * When frying or sautéing onions, a few sage leaves added to the pan intensifies the richness of the onion flavor.
- * Add two or three tablespoons finely chopped sage to a cup of flour for coating chicken for frying or baking.

Rosemary

- * Use the stiff rosemary sprigs to skewer shrimp, pieces of pork, poultry or lamb for grilling - they add a wonderful flavor. Slip off the leaves and save for other uses.
- * Finely chop rosemary leaves and add to bread dough - two tablespoons herbs to each 4 cups flour.
- * Use rosemary two different ways with roasted meats - Chop rosemary leaves and rub on meats - and lay a few sprigs on top and a few under the meat in the roasting pan.
- * Drop a few sprigs of rosemary into the water for poaching fish or eggs.
- * Put a few sprigs of rosemary on coals when doing outdoor-grilled meats.
- * Add a couple sprigs to cooking water for potatoes, rice and pasta, especially when serving with poultry or fish.

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