

Herbs – Plain and Fancy – Ira Wallace – Southern Exposure Seed Exchange

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Cooking with Culinary Herbs

For those who are just starting exploring herbs, here are a few guidelines.

First: Use recipes. Choose recipes with ingredients you know and like. As an example, a family who loves pasta, garlic and cheese might try making Pesto (basil sauce). This is a great introduction to fresh basil.

Second: ask others about food that catches your attention. If you tasted a great dish at a restaurant, note the name and look it up online or in the library. If you're at a friend's for dinner, don't hesitate to get a recipe for the food you enjoyed. Most cooks are proud to share their successes.

Next, try introducing a new taste as a side dish or an optional sampling. For example, offer cream cheese mixed with a new herb on crackers and other old favorite snacks. Each person can judge the new flavor for him/herself. Your traditional favorites can be the main dishes, and new tastes and recipes add excitement.

Herb butter with fresh or dried chopped herbs is a great quick flavoring for reheating a loaf of bread. Any vegetable can have a few leaves from your favorite herbs added to it. Cottage cheese or cream cheese can have two tablespoons of fresh herb chopped into an 8 oz. container. Popovers or biscuits are all the better when a tablespoon of fresh or a teaspoon of dried rosemary is added.

Sunday brunch with herb omelets is the chef's delight. Have some fresh chopped herbs – parsley, thyme, chervil, basil, and chives – ready. Beat the eggs gently with a bit of milk. Add a pat of butter to a pan already hot. Ladle in some egg mixture. Then cook until the omelet is puffy and comes away from the sides of the pan. Sprinkle in the herbs and maybe a bit of cheese. Fold over and serve garnished with more herbs on top for color and flavor.

Salad Bar with Herbs – the ever-popular salad is much more exciting with herbs. Best are fresh or dried herbs in an oil & vinegar dressing which liberates the flavors. Or offer bowls of a chopped assortment from the list of salad herbs.

Using Fresh or Dried Herbs in a Recipe

A recipe requiring dried herbs can be easily changed to the use of fresh. Double or triple the amount when using fresh. Confusing? The reason is that with the water removed, dried herb represents a much larger quantity of fresh herbs, so the flavor is more intense.

Fortunately for the herb gardener, no herbs *need* to be dried before use. The perfection of flavor is always fresh. Herbs are dried or frozen when there's an abundance, for those times when the fresh are not available.

Substitutions of One Herb for Another

You can often substitute. A consideration in substituting is the strength of the herb. Mild herbs are chervil, burnet, parsley or borage. Stronger herbs are rosemary, sage, tarragon and thyme. If a recipe calls for less than a teaspoon of herb, it's probably a strong herb. Substitute strong for strong or adjust the amounts.

Important Culinary Herb Varieties

Herbs to Season Green Salads:

Anise – leaves	Chervil – leaves	Lovage – leaves
Basil – leaves	Chicory (Witloof) – leaves	Nasturtiums – leaves, petals, seeds
Balm, Lemon – leaves	Chives – leaves	Sorrel – leaves
Borage – leaves	Dill – leaves/flowers	Sweet Marjoram – leaves
Burnet, Salad – leaves	Egyptian Onions (Leeks) - tops, bulbs	Summer Savory – leaves
Caraway – leaves	Fennel – leaves, flowering umbels, stalk	Tarragon – leaves
Cardoon – blanched inner stalks, top of stalk	Garlic Chives – leaves	Thyme – leaves

Herbs Used for their Savory Seeds

Anise	Ben Sesame	Caraway	Coriander	Cumin	Dill
Fennel	Mustard (White)	Nasturtiums			

Herbs Used to Season Cooking

Angelica	Chervil	Applemint	Lovage	Oregano	Rosemary	
Applemint	Chives		Marjoram	Parsley	Rue	Tarragon
Basils	Egyptian Onion	Orangemint	Orangemint	Rosemary	Summer Savory	
Borage	Garlic Chives	Spearmint	Oregano	Rue	Spearmint	
Burnet, Salad	Garden Sage	Lovage	Parsley	Summer Savory	Thyme	

Herbs Used to Make Teas (* easy to grow from seed)

Agrimony	Angelica	Anise (seeds)*	Lemonbalm*
Bergamot*	Boneset	Stevia	Caraway (seeds)*
Catnip*	Chamomile*	Flavored Basils*	Dill (seeds)*
Fennel (seeds)*	Feverfew	Horehound*	Lovage*
Applemint	Orangemint	Peppermint	Spearmint
Pennyroyal*	Rosemary	Sage, Garden*	Sweet Marjoram*
Thyme, Garden*	Thyme, Lemon	Verbena, Lemon	Wintergreen
Mountain mint	Roselle*	Anise-Hyssop*	Lemongrass

Making Herbal Tea

- To make tea, use one tablespoon fresh leaves or flowers (as appropriate, depending on the species). If the plant material is dried, use one teaspoon.
- Add the herb — or a blend of herbs — to a tea ball or a steeping cup that's resting in a mug. If desired, you can include some clippings of stevia, a natural sweetener, with the tea herbs.
- Pour hot — but not boiling — water in the mug and let steep for five minutes or less.
- Add honey, lemon or sugar as desired.

Caution: If you're not used to drinking fresh herbal teas, start slowly. Make sure you know the identity of the plant you're using to make tea, and be watchful for adverse reactions. Finally, don't use any leaves or flowers that have been treated with pesticides.

Tips for Harvesting Herbs for Tea

Harvest early in the day, after the dew has dried, but while the herbs are still lush in the cool of the morning.

Most herbs are at their peak just before they bloom.

Try not to tear or crush the herbs until you are ready to use them. You don't want to waste any of the essential oils.

HERB MUSTARD *Use this zippy mustard and it soon will become a family favorite*

2 c. prepared mustard	1 tsp. dried oregano leaves, crumbled
1/4 c. parsley flakes, crumbled	
2 tblsp. dried tarragon leaves, crumbled	1 tsp. dried basil leaves, crumbled
1 tsp. dried dill weed	1/4 cider vinegar

Pour mustard into large mixing bowl. Add parsley, tarragon, dill, oregano and basil. Mix thoroughly. Gradually stir in vinegar. Place in covered jar and refrigerate. Let stand for 2 or 3 days to allow herbs to flavor mustard. Makes 2 cups.

HERB BUTTER *Delicious on French bread, rolls, baked potatoes and meat*

1 lb. butter or regular margarine	1 tblsp. dried tarragon leaves, crumbled
2 tblsp. chopped fresh parsley	1 tblsp. chopped fresh or frozen chives
1 tblsp. dried basil leaves, crumbled	

Place butter in large mixing bowl and let stand at room temperature until soft. Add parsley, basil, tarragon and chives and mix thoroughly with electric mixer. Pack into a container with a tight cover and let stand overnight for flavor to develop. Makes 1 pound.

BASIC HERB JELLY (Tarragon, mint, sage, thyme, rosemary)

1/4 c. vinegar	Few drops food coloring (if desired)
4 1/2 c. sugar	3 c. water
1/2 bottle Certo fruit pectin	1 c. fresh herbs, packed firmly

Boil water. Add herbs and steep 10 minutes covered. Strain. In large pan measure 2 cups of herb infusion. Add 1/4 cup vinegar and 4 1/2 cups sugar. Bring to a hard boil, stirring constantly. Add pectin. Bring to a full rolling boil and cook 1 minute. Skim off foam and pour into jars. Cover with paraffin.

FINES HERBES *Perk up the most ordinary soups and stews with this herb blend*

1 tblsp. grated lemon rind	1 tsp. dried marjoram leaves
1 tblsp. parsley flakes	1 tsp. dried basil leaves
1 tblsp. dried tarragon leaves	1 tsp. celery salt

With blender set at lowest speed, sprinkle grated lemon rind, parsley, tarragon, marjoram, basil and celery salt into blender a little at a time and allow to blend for 5 seconds after each addition. Place in airtight container. Use 1/2 tsp. for 4 servings. Makes 3 tablespoons.

HERB MIX *Make your own herb mix by the pint or quart to add to all meat or vegetable soups or stews, using these dried herbs.*

1 C each of parsley, thyme, and marjoram (or oregano)	1/4 C of either rosemary, basil or sage
1/2 C summer savory	2-3 crushed bay leaves

Mix well. Use 1 T at a time per 2 quarts of soup or stew stock, placed in a tea strainer or a cheesecloth bag during the last hour of cooking (Best with beef, potatoes, onions, celery, carrots, carrots, and a little garlic powder).

NO-SALT HERB BLEND

4 T oregano leaves
4 T onion powder

4 t each of marjoram, basil, savory, garlic powder, thyme and rosemary

1 t each of sage and ground black pepper

Combine ingredients. Crush a small amount at a time in a mortar and pestle or in the blender. Spoon into a saltshaker. Makes about 1 C.

⇒ To make herb vinegars: Put 2 C fresh herbs in quart jar. Heat white wine vinegar or rice wine vinegar to a simmer. Pour over herbs. Cap. Let it sit for 2 to 3 weeks. Taste. If too strong, add more vinegar. If too weak, add more herbs and let sit longer.

⇒ Try sage for pork, fennel for fish, rosemary for chicken and lamb.

DIXIE PESTO

1 C snipped basil, fresh
3/4 C grated Parmesan cheese
1/2 C snipped parsley

1/4 C pecans
2 garlic cloves

Put above ingredients in blender, process till it forms a paste, scraping sides occasionally. While machine is running, add 1/3 cup olive oil, process until this forms a consistency of softened butter.

Serve over pasta.

⇒ Basil goes with tomatoes the way apples go with cinnamon. You haven't stewed a tomato until you have added basil.

⇒ Try it in tomato salads, or chopped up with mayonnaise in tomato-lettuce sandwiches.

⇒ You can freeze pesto in plastic, pre-molded ice cube trays, then store in double plastic baggies. The cubes, containing about 1T each, can be used for flavoring vegetables, meats, stews, soups all winter long.

⇒ Basil is wonderful chopped over sun-warmed tomatoes with a bit of fresh garlic and sweet olive oil.

⇒ Lemon basil may be used liberally in seasoning vegetables, rice dishes, fish, and poultry; add to salad dressings and salads; and wherever you want a bouquet of lemon taste combined with the scent of basil.

⇒ Treat yourself and others to fresh or dried "Mixed Herbs" - equal parts of thyme, savory and parsley with smaller amounts of marjoram and/or lemon thyme. This can be used for everything! Try it instead of salt on meats, fish, vegetables, eggs. Add chives or onions or lemon juice or peel if desired.

⇒ Blending herbs into butters or oils draws out and extends the flavor. Store in refrigerator and a spoonful of the mixture can be added to foods as needed.

Anise Hyssop. *Agastache foeniculum* is a very pretty perennial that makes a great *tea*, especially if you like the taste of licorice. Anise hyssop is a native of North America, growing wild particularly in the Prairie States. Because of its long lasting flowers and sweet aroma, anise hyssop was gathered by the pioneers as a decorative wildflower.

Basil. *Ocimum basilicum* A delicious and healthy tea can be made with fresh basil. Basil comes in over 60 varieties, sweet, spicy, lemon and anise flavors. In India a flavorful hot brew or iced drink, is made from the leaves and blossoms of tulsi or holy basil plant *O. sanctum*. Lemon Basil *O.citriodora* a New Mexico heirloom makes a great tea and is preferred by many chefs.

Bee balm. *Monarda didyma* Besides splashing the summer garden with shades of red, pink, violet or white, the flowers of bee balm (*Bergamot*) lend a citrus-mint flavor to tea. Flowering lasts from midsummer until early fall. Also called bergamot or Oswego tea, bee balm puts up with a wide range of soil and light conditions but prefers full sun and moist, rich soil.

Catnip. *Nepeta cataria* Catnip tea, brewed from catnip leaf, is among the folk herbal remedies people traditionally used to treat infants and children with colds or flu. It makes a relaxing bedtime drink. An easy to grow perennial for you and your feline friends.

Chamomile. A sweet miniature-daisy-like plant with feathery foliage, German chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) is a trouble-free annual that's easily grown from seed and self-sows readily, and it's the type of chamomile that's usually used in making tea. Roman chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) is a perennial, hardy to Zone 6, but it lends a somewhat bitter flavor to tea. Give chamomile a sunny site and moist, well-drained soil.

Cilantro. *Coriander sativum* the leaves of the Coriander plant -- have medicinal value that rivals its value as a spice. Cilantro has been used since the beginning of recorded history as a digestive aid, especially in the relief of indigestion.

Horehound. *Marrubium vulgare* This member of the mint family has a pleasant fragrance and a menthol-like flavor. Use as a tea and a flavoring for Horehound candies.

Lavender. *Lavandula spp.* The flowers from the true English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) are preferred, the one recommended for medicinal and culinary use - the other varieties of lavender are usually not as flavourful and usually are more camphor-y.

Lemon balm. *Melissa officinalis* is related to the mint family, but has a pleasant lemony flavor. Lemon balm plants grow best in somewhat dry soil and partial shade.

Lemongrass. A favorite ingredient in Thai cooking, lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) also shows up in many herbal tea blends. The plant is a stately clump of fairly fine-bladed grass, two to five feet tall, that grows in full sun or light shade. Gardeners north of Zone 8b (Zone 9, to be sure) will need to overwinter this tender annual as a container plant.

Mint. *Mentha spp* This family of perennials alone offers a lot of tea options, namely peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*), spearmint (*Mentha spicata*), and a host of special flavors — apple, orange, lemon, pineapple, even chocolate. Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) also offers a lemon-mint flavor. The newest leaves have the most flavor; use them fresh for hot tea as well as flavoring lemonade and iced tea.

Roselle. *Hibiscus sabdariffa* It flavors drinks, jams, jellies, wine, and sauces in the Caribbean, Mexico, West Africa, and Egypt. It's the "red" in Red Zinger Tea! Roselle is used fresh in salads, especially fruit salads, and pies or tarts. Annual or tender perennial similar to okra. Germinate at 75-85°F in 7-14 days. Full sun. Height 36-60". Red stems and leaf tips. Cream or burgundy-colored flowers with red centers are followed by showy red calyces (which make hibiscus tea and jam). Flowers and young leaves are edible and have a citrus tang. Thin plants to 3 feet apart. Roselle is often planted in rows where it forms a dense hedge by mid summer.

Rosemary. *Rosemarinus officinalis* Rosemary tea is very aromatic with a hint of pine. It has been used for centuries to improve memory and sweeten the breath. It can be sweetened with honey and served hot or chilled.

Sage. *Salvia officinalis* The flavours of sage and lemon blend nicely. It's a very herbal taste, which would be good for those of you who enjoy green teas.

Stevia. *Stevia rebaudiana* Sometimes called sweet herb, stevia is said to be a natural accompaniment to a tea garden; its leaves are considered natural sweeteners.