

Cooking with Herbs

Here are some helpful tips for using herbs in your dishes!

Experimenting with herbs in cooking can be fun and delicious. Herbs add glamour and exotic new flavour to our favourite foods and the addition of just one herb or a combination of herbs can transform an ordinary dish into something extraordinary!

The flavour of herbs resides in the essential oils they contain. Herbs should be used sparingly to enhance, not overpower, natural food flavours. Every herb has its own distinct flavour, so it is better to use too little than too much. Some herbs go together, while others may clash in flavour when combined.

Herbs can generally be broken down into three categories:

1. Delicate flavoured-these generally combine well with most other spices and herbs.

Examples are: chervil, chives, parsley

2. Medium flavoured herbs-small amounts blend well with other herbs, but large amounts are better used on their own. Examples are: basil, dill, fennel, oregano, tarragon, mint, marjoram, savory and thyme

3. Strong flavoured herbs-these even when used on their own should be used sparingly.

Examples are: rosemary, sage and bay

Your taste buds are the best judge of what goes with which type of foods. Culinary Herb Charts are only a guide, so experiment and enjoy!

- Herbs lose their flavour over time, so purchase them in small quantities and replace them often.
- If you are harvesting and drying your own herbs, cut them in dry conditions-after the dew has dried off and make sure to dry them in a dark, warm location with plenty of air circulation-either hanging in small bunches(large bunches are susceptible to mold formation in the center)or in single layers on drying racks-move herbs around daily to ensure proper drying. (Do not use metal racks of any kind for drying herbs)
- Once herbs are dry store them as whole as possible, preferably in glass containers in a cool, dark and dry location. They can be stored this way for up to one year. (Remember to throw the unused ones in the compost next year)
- Chives can be successfully dried, by dehydrating -cut with scissors in ¼" (1cm) pieces and either place on a non-metallic dish or tray or in a paper bag and place in the fridge-usually takes 4 to 5 days. Once dried remove from fridge and store in glass containers in a cool, dry, dark location.
- Dehydrators can also be used for drying herbs, but we do not recommend microwaves, as they may alter the chemical make-up of the plant material.
- Clean and chop or grind your dried herbs as needed-you won't believe how good they are.
- Dry herbs crumble easily when touched, so an easy way to obtain a small amount of dried herbs suitable for cooking is to rub the branches between your hands over a container or plate.
- Freezing is another way to preserve herbs, this is especially useful for leafy herbs such as basil, parsley and chervil that either don't dry well or lose their flavour on drying. Just place the fresh herbs in a freezer bag and remove as much of the air as possible, label and date bag, then freeze.
- There is no need to thaw herbs before using. They are easier to chop when frozen and thaw very quickly.

- Another method of freezing herbs is to puree the herbs in a small amount of water and freeze in ice cube trays. Remove from trays when frozen and place in labeled freezer bags in the freezer. This method is particularly handy for herbs used in soups, stews and casseroles, as you just add a whole frozen cube (approx. 2T-30ml) to your pot/dish.
- Herbs can be stored frozen for up to 1 year.
- Put any unused herbs, fresh or dried in your compost pile, they will add excellent nutrients for use in your garden next year.
- Make sure all herbs and edible flowers you use have been properly identified, by genus and species, many plants have the same common names and some are very toxic.
- Any plant you intend on eating should be organically grown and free from all chemicals.
- Be creative and experiment with single herbs and herbal combinations –there are no rules except Enjoy!