

HARVESTING, DRYING AND STORING.

These are some general guidelines for harvesting, drying and storing herbs. It is recommended to refer to specific information on each herb for information regarding the part of plant to use and how it is used, some herbs must be processed when fresh and lose their qualities on drying.

HARVESTING

One should always try to harvest plants and plant parts when they are at their optimum.

TIME OF YEAR:

ROOTS -in the fall after their top has died off, can also be harvested in the spring before new growth begins -but plant may be difficult to locate.

SPROUTS-in the spring until the stalk forms

LEAVES-spring/summer before flower buds appear

FLOWERS-summer buds and freshly opened flowers

SEEDS-summer/fall when beginning to fall off (ripe)

WHOLE PLANT(AERIAL PARTS)- summer/fall as flowering begins

BARK-spring/summer when the sap is up

TIME OF DAY:

Mid morning when the sun has dried off the dew but before the heat of the sun has evaporated the water and oils out of the plant.

DRYING PLANTS AND PLANT MATERIAL

Some suggested locations for drying include- hooks from ceiling or lattice work, top of refrigerator, in a lace curtain hung from the ceiling (turn daily), or a drying barn. Unless otherwise stated all plants and plant material should be not be wet when harvested. Dry plants and plant material out of the sun in a warm place-20-30c, with good air circulation. Make sure to label your herbs when putting them in the drying area because some times they look quite different when dry and can easily be mixed up-wooden clothes pins and a marker work well and can be clipped onto the plant material or placed in the drying rack.

It is also possible to dry plants and plant material in an oven set at a very low temperature- 150F, watch carefully to avoid over drying or burning. A microwave is not recommended, tends to cause the herbs to take on a "tin" taste, and can burn up quite quickly. A dehydrator is another option that many have great success with.

WHOLE PLANTS can be bundled in small bundles and secured with elastic bands which shrinks with the plant and hung upside down in a warm place with good air circulation out of the sunshine. Small bundles are recommended to ensure thorough drying of all plants and prevent mold from forming in the center of the bundle. They can also be laid out in a single layer on drying racks or in cardboard boxes(must be turned regularly) usually take 7 to 14 days to dry thoroughly, plant should be crisp but still have good colour.

LEAVES can be harvested separately or removed from the whole plant when dried by simply running your fingers down the stalk of the plant. If leaves are harvested separately they should be laid out as described above in a single layer and checked and turned regularly if needed. Leaves usually dry in 3 to 7 days. When dry they will be crisp but still have good colour.

FLOWERS AND BUDS should be laid out in a single layer on drying racks or in cardboard boxes(turn daily). Should dry in 1 to 5 days, store appropriately as soon as dry to limit discolouration, flowers should maintain most of their colour when dry but will be crisp.

SEEDS either loose or in pods should be laid out on sheets of brown paper, or place in a brown bag(leave open), or cardboard box. Seeds usually dry in 5-10 days.

ROOTS should be cut as soon as they are harvested into smaller pieces because once they dry they are almost impossible to cut-hard as rock. First wash the soil off roots with water and a brush, then slice perpendicular to the direction of their growth, then chop finer if required and lay out flat in drying racks or cardboard boxes(turn regularly).Roots will usually dry in 7 to 14 days and will be very hard when dry.

BARK should be laid out in a single layer on drying racks or in cardboard boxes (turn regularly) and then broken into smaller pieces as it dries to accommodate storage. Bark can take up to 14 days to dry, it should easily break into pieces when dry.

STORAGE

Herbs when thoroughly dried can be stored in glass jars, canning jars, cookie tins, cardboard boxes and paper bags.

Do not use plastic. Make sure that the container you use is thoroughly clean and dry and if recycling glass jars make sure the lids are clean and seal properly. It is a good idea to leave the lid off the jar for the first 24 hours to allow any moisture in the jar to evaporate. Store containers in a cool dark place and it is a good idea to check your containers for a few days for any signs of moisture due to incomplete drying or moisture in the jar, you can remove plant material and dry it some more. If you notice any mold in the jar the plant material will have to be discarded. Most dried herbs lose their potency within 6 to 12 months so after one year any remaining dried material should be discarded.

Once dried, herbs should be stored as whole as possible, with the exception of roots which must be cut before drying, do not break up leaves until you are ready to use them, depending on the use for your herb you may be able to use the stems as well as the leaves and flowers-i.e. Herbal teas, tinctures or any use where the end product is to be strained or filtered, they can either be stored separately or left attached to the leaves and flowers. Make sure to label and date your storage containers accurately.

FREEZING HERBS

Some herbs store well frozen and soft plants such as basil, chervil, and parsley often retain better flavor when stored this way. To freeze herbs place clean plant material in freezer bags, remove as much air as possible from the bag and label with name and date, then place in the freezer. To use do not thaw, just chop and use as required, this is handy for culinary purposes but if planning to make extractions it is important to remember that you still have the water content in the plant material and this may affect the strength of your extraction. Herbs can be stored frozen for six months.