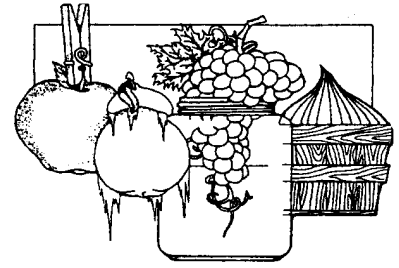


Quality for Keeps



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Information for those who produce and preserve food

Herbs add flavor all year long

Herbs are at their succulent best when young and tender. Freeze herbs to capture that flavor for later use. Besides helping flavor foods when cutting back on salt, fat and sugar, herbs (both fresh and dried) have antioxidants that may help protect against such diseases as cancer and heart disease.

A general guideline when using fresh herbs in a recipe is to use 3 times as much as you would use of a dried herb.

Storage. Place fresh herbs in a perforated plastic bag and store up to two or three days in your refrigerator crisper drawer. Cut holes in a plastic food bag in several places with a hole punch or scissors, if perforated bags are not available.

To keep herbs in your refrigerator up to a week, store like cut flowers. Snip off the ends of the stems on the diagonal, and place herbs in a tall glass with an inch of water. Cover them loosely with a plastic bag to allow for air circulation. Refrigerate and change the water daily. Expect the flavor to diminish the longer herbs are stored.

Wash. 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. Remove any remaining moisture with clean paper towels.



When washing a larger amount of herbs at one time, treat like 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.

Note: Before harvesting a large amount of herbs from a home garden, washing herbs down with a hose the day before to help remove any large particles of dirt or grit that might be on the leaves.

Preparation. For most recipes, 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 herbs coarsely into a small bowl or cup and snip back and forth with your scissors. To cut large leaves, such as basil, into thin strips, 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.

Use only the leaves on most herbs. Remove leaves from firm stemmed herbs by running your fingers down the stem from top to bottom. Both leaves and stems of young, tender small leafed herbs may be used. Later in the season, discard stems as they become tough

Add fresh herbs at the end of the cooking period to preserve their flavor.

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Add the more delicate herbs, (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.

Add sturdier herbs, such as dill seeds, oregano, rosemary, tarragon and thyme, during the last 20 minutes of cooking.

Add fresh herbs to refrigerated cold foods several hours before serving to allow flavors to blend.

Freezing. Fresh herbs can be frozen for two to six months. Frozen herbs are best used in cooked foods. Freeze herbs individually or in ice.

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.

Or wash 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. Herbs may stain plastic ice cube trays.

Or make an herb slurry. Puree your washed herbs in a blender with a small amount of water. Pour into mini - ice cube trays and freeze until solid. Transfer to a freezer bag and add to foods, as desired.

Label all frozen herbs with name of herb and date frozen. For convenience, store individual packages in one large container.

Do some sample lots to determine personal preference before freezing large amounts of herbs.



Combining herbs and foods

Here are some ideas from University of Nebraska Extension to help you start combining fresh herbs with your foods.

Herb	Uses
BASIL	A natural snipped in with tomatoes; terrific in fresh pesto; other possibilities include pasta sauce, peas and zucchini.
CHIVES	Dips, potatoes and tomatoes.
CILANTRO	Mexican, Asian and Caribbean cooking; salsas, tomatoes.
DILL	Carrots, cottage cheese, fish, green beans, potatoes, tomatoes.
MINT	Carrots, fruit salads, peas, tabouli and tea.
OREGANO	Peppers, tomatoes.
PARSLEY	The curly leaf is most common, but the flat-leaf or Italian parsley is more strongly flavored and often preferred in cooking. Natural for parsley include potato salad and tabouli.
ROSEMARY	Chicken, fish, lamb, pork, roasted potatoes, soups, stews and tomatoes.
SAGE	Poultry seasoning, and stuffing.
TARRAGON	Chicken, eggs, and fish.
THYME	Eggs, lima beans, potatoes, poultry, summer squash, and tomatoes.
WINTER SAVORY	Dried bean dishes and stews.

Drying herbs

In most cases, leaves only are gathered, but flowers and herbs of some herbs are also harvested. Harvest the leaves when they contain the optimum amount of essential oils. These oils give herbs their special flavor or scent.

Ideally, cut herbs soon after the dew has evaporated from the leaves in the morning. Harvest on a dry day that has been preceded by at least two sunny days. In most cases, cut stems for harvest when the flower buds are just beginning to open. Mints, however, have the most oil in the leaves when the spikes are in full bloom.

When gathering a large quantity of herbs, use an open-weave basket or containers that allow good air movement. Don't stuff herbs into plastic bags, which can heat up and cause rapid deterioration of herbs. Never cut more herbs that can be dried at one time. Perennial herbs can be cut back to about half its height; annual herbs can be cut down to a few inches.

Large leaf herbs are usually stripped from the stems before drying. Herbs in this group include basil, dill, lemon balm, lovage, mint, sage, lemon verbena and tarragon. Spread these leaves in single layers for quickest drying. Herbs with smaller leaves can be dried on the stems. These herbs include thyme, summer and winter savory, rosemary, oregano and marjoram. Strip the leaves after drying is complete.

There are a number of methods of drying herbs, some of which include rack drying, bag drying and microwaving.

Rack drying involves laying herbs on a rack and placing the rack on a flat surface in a location that has good ventilation. Choose a dark, well-ventilated room where temperatures run between 70 and 90 degrees F for drying. Air conditioning is helpful, because it reduces humidity in the air.

Use frames covered with cheesecloth or other netting, or metal window screens with cheesecloth laid on top for drying. Prepare the frames or screens before you cut the plants. Herbs usually dry in several days depending on humidity levels.

When dry, take a handful of herbs and hold them over a large tray, clean dishtowel, or large sheets of waxed paper and shake or rub the herbs with your hands to remove the leaves. Collect the leaves and store in an airtight container. Herb leaves should dry in three to four days under proper conditions. In humid weather, spread the herbs on a cookie sheet and dry them in an oven at about 125 degrees F for a few minutes before placing them in an airtight container.

Bag drying is a good method for herbs with large leaves and long stems such as basil and sage. Punch a few holes in a clean paper bag for ventilation. Cut a handful of herbs, tie ends together, and place in the paper bag. The stems of the herbs should be at the opening of the bag. Gather the bag around the stems and tie with one long piece of string.



Hang the bundle in a warm (70 degrees F to 80 degrees F), well ventilated area.

When dry, shake the bag. The leaves should fall to the bottom of the sack. Some herbs may take 2 to 4 weeks to completely dry.

Microwave drying works best with small bunches of herbs. Place a small batch of herbs on a paper towel and microwave on medium power for 1 to 3 minutes. Watch herbs carefully as they dry rapidly. Stop the microwave and rotate herbs at least every 30 seconds. Continue until herbs are dry. Herbs will crumble easily when thoroughly dried.

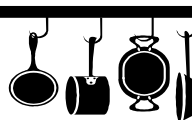
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The Penn State Directory of Herbs, hortweb.cas.psu.edu/extension/veg crops/herb_directory.html

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THE RECIPE BOX



Mint Jelly with Liquid Pectin

1- $\frac{3}{4}$ cups mint juice (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups firmly packed fresh mint and 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups water)
3- $\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 pouch liquid pectin (3 oz.)

Procedure: Sterile canning jars and prepare two-piece canning lids according to manufacturer's directions.

To prepare juice. Wash mint, crush leaves and stems or finely chop. Place in saucepan, add water and bring quickly to a boil. Remove from heat, cover and let stand 10 minutes. (A few drops of green food coloring can be added if desired.) Strain to remove mint. Discard mint.

To make jelly. Measure 1- $\frac{3}{4}$ cups mint juice into a large saucepot. Stir in the sugar and lemon juice. Place on high heat, stir constantly and bring to a full boil that cannot be stirred down. Add the liquid pectin and heat again to a full rolling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute. Remove from heat; quickly skim off foam.

Pour hot jelly immediately into hot, sterile jars, leaving $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch headspace. Wipe rims of jars with a dampened clean paper towel; adjust two-piece metal canning lids. Process pints or half-pints in a Boiling Water Bath Canner for 5 minutes at 0 to 1000 ft altitude, or for 10 minutes at 1,000 to 6,000 ft altitude. Yield: About 3 or 4 half-pint jars

Reprinted with permission of the University of Georgia. Anne Rood & Elizabeth L. Andress. 2003. Mint Jelly with Liquid Pectin. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia, Cooperative Extension Service

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