

Cooking With Herbs

Herbs come from the leaves of plants. They have been used for centuries in both cooking and as medicines. When it comes to cooking, the topic of whether herbs are the most flavorful when they are fresh or dry, is largely a matter of taste and surely debated in countless kitchens across the world. Taste however, can be affected by both storage and cooking techniques. Here are some tips to guide you.

When you need to substitute dry herbs for fresh, use this conversion: one tablespoon of fresh equals one teaspoon of dry. If you are cooking something for several hours, avoid cooking out the flavors and wait until the dish is almost ready before adding either fresh or dried herbs. For foods you are chilling, such as pasta salads, you'll need to do the opposite, since adding herbs several hours in advance gives the flavors a chance to meld.

Fresh Herbs

When you buy fresh herbs, treat them much as you would fresh flowers. First, snip off the bottom of the stems then throw away the damaged leaves. Stems that are soft can be eaten along with the rest of the herb. Put the herbs, stems down, in a tall glass of water, leaving the top part of the herb exposed. Cover the top with plastic and place the glass in the refrigerator. Change the water every other day or so. When you are ready to use the herbs, rinse them again, pat dry, then chop them or use cooking scissors to cut the herbs until they are very fine.

If you grow your own herbs, you can preserve them for months in the freezer. Wash and dry them first, then place them in freezer bags. Be sure to mark the date on the bag. Herbs that freeze well include tarragon, basil, dill, chives and parsley. Parsley, perhaps the most commonly used of all herbs, in addition to serving as a garnish, can freshen your breath (when eaten fresh) and is a source of vitamins A and C.

Dry Herbs

Though many people store dry herbs above their stove, it is not recommended since the constant heat source and exposure to light can cause them to lose flavor. A dark, cool and dry place is best.

To dry herbs, your microwave is a great time saver. Begin by washing them, then patting dry and placing the leaves between paper towels. Heat on your lowest microwave setting for around three minutes. Herbs that are great for drying include bay leaves, marjoram and oregano.

To release the flavor of dried herbs, crumble them between your fingers or use a grinder. To check the freshness of dried herbs, rub them between your fingers, if there is only a little aroma or none at all, it is time to throw out the old and replenish your stock. Most dried herbs have about a shelf life of a year.

When to use fresh

Certain recipes such as pesto or tabbouleh require fresh herbs as the central component of the dish. You wouldn't want to use dried basil in the classic Italian salad that layers mozzarella, tomatoes and basil leaves. Other recipes may be enhanced by fresh herbs but you could still get similar results using a dried version. A salad dressing where the dried herbs would become saturated is a good example.

Making the change

Essential oils are more concentrated in dried herbs so you use less. If you want to substitute dried herbs in a recipe that calls for fresh, the conversion is simple. Reduce tablespoons to teaspoons; two Tablespoons of fresh oregano equals two teaspoons dried.

Ginger is an exception to this interchangeable rule. If a recipe calls for fresh ginger, you cannot substitute ground. The flavors are completely different.

Meet in the middle

You can perk up the flavor of a dried herb by combining it with common fresh parsley. Pick the parsley leaves from the stems, sprinkle with the required amount of dried herbs and chop the parsley fine. This breathes life into the dried product and adding parsley couldn't hurt any dish.

Use them up!

Fresh herbs are expensive. What if you buy a bunch of thyme but your recipe only calls for a tablespoon? Don't let the remainder go to waste. Use a few sprigs as a garnish to the finished recipe. Tie some sprigs together and use them as a basting brush or toss them into a soup. Drop the extra herbs into a mild oil or vinegar to make infusions for later cooking.

If you can find no other use for the fresh herbs before they go bad, hang a bundle upside down and make dried herbs

Dipping Oil for Bread

Guacamole II

Green Herb Salad With Champagne Vinaigrette

Basil Pesto

Dipping Oil for Bread

The perfect blend of herbs, spices, garlic, and red pepper mixed with olive oil and serve with crusty bread.

- 1 tsp crushed red pepper
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp dried rosemary
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 tsp parsley flakes
- 1 tsp granulated garlic
- 1 tsp minced garlic
- 1 tsp kosher salt

1 -Combine all ingredients, except oil, on a shallow bowl or plate.

2 -Pour olive oil over.

Servings: 1

Yield: ½ cup

Cooking Times

Preparation Time: 5 minutes

Tips

Notes: Serve with fresh-baked bread for dipping.

Guacamole II

- 4 ripe avocados
- 2 limes, juiced
- ½ medium red onion, finely chopped
- 1 big handful fresh cilantro leaves, finely chopped
- ¼ tsp ground cumin
- 2 Tbs extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Freshly-ground black pepper, to taste

- 1 Halve and pit the avocados; with a spoon scoop out the flesh into a bowl. Mash the avocados with a fork, leaving them a bit chunky. Add the remaining ingredients, and fold everything gently together to mix. Taste and adjust seasoning.
- 2 Lay a piece of plastic wrap right on the surface of the guacamole so it doesn't brown and refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving.
- 3 This recipe yields about 2 cups.

Servings: 1

Yield: 2.000000 cups

Recipe Type: Accompaniment, Dips/Spreads

Source

Source: FOOD 911 with Tyler Florence - (Show # FO-1E07) - from the TV FOOD NETWORK

Green Herb Salad With Champagne Vinaigrette

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 Tbs minced shallot
- 2 Tbs Champagne vinegar
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp freshly-ground black pepper
- 1 large head butter lettuce, leaves separated, and torn into bite-size pieces
- 1 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves
- ½ cup fresh cilantro leaves
- ½ cup fresh chervil sprigs

- 1 In the bottom of a salad bowl, combine the olive oil and shallot. Add the vinegar, salt and pepper and mix well with a fork. Top with the lettuce, parsley, cilantro and chervil. When ready to serve, toss well. Mound the salad in individual bowls or on plates.
- 2 This recipe yields 4 servings.
- 3 Comments: In many Mediterranean countries, fresh herbs are used as primary salad ingredients. Herbs are appreciated for the complex flavor and refreshing taste they bring to a salad. Parsley, cilantro, chervil, arugula and mint are commonly used this way. Fresh oregano and thyme might be added in smaller quantities. You may use only a single herb or a mixture. Do not use woody-stemmed herbs such as rosemary or sage. Before tossing, the dressing and salad can stand for up to 30 minutes.
- 4 Variation: To enrich the dressing, add a little Maytag, Stilton, Gorgonzola or other blue-veined cheese along with the vinegar, coarsely mashing it with a fork. Serve the salad after a main course, accompanied with a sliver of the cheese and some walnuts.

Servings: 4

Recipe Type: Salads/Dressings

Source

Source: Williams-Sonoma at <http://www.williams-sonoma.com>

Author Notes

Recipe adapted from Williams-Sonoma Collection Series, Salad, by Georgeanne Brennan (Simon & Schuster, 2001)

Basil Pesto

- 2 cups fresh basil leaves
- ¼ cup toasted pine nuts
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp freshly-ground black pepper
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil - (about)
- ½ cup grated Parmesan

1 In a blender, pulse the basil, pine nuts, garlic, ½ teaspoon of salt, and ¼ teaspoon of pepper until finely chopped. With the blender still running, gradually add enough oil to form a smooth and thick consistency. Transfer the pesto to a medium bowl and stir in ½ cup of cheese. Season the pesto with more salt and pepper, to taste. (The pesto can be made 2 days ahead. Cover and refrigerate.)

2 This recipe yields 1 cup.

Yield: 1.00 cup

Recipe Type: Accompaniment, Condiments, Sauces

Source

Author: Giada De Laurentiis

Source: EVERYDAY ITALIAN with Giada De Laurentiis - (Show # EI-1D07) - from the TV FOOD NETWORK