

FNH-00561L

HERBS

Storage

Fresh flavor is just a snip away if you keep fresh herbs in your garden or on your window sill. Here are a few ways to keep those herbs fresh and ready to use.

The trick to keeping herbs fresh is to treat them as you would a delicate flower. Although rinsed herbs wrapped in towels and enclosed in a plastic bag keep well enough for a day or two, their life is greatly extended when they are stored as follows:

1. Immerse whole herbs sprigs in cool water, shaking gently to dislodge any soil or insects. Discard decayed stalks and leaves. Snip off stems just above a break or bruise. Gently shake excess water from leaves, being careful to avoid further bruising.
2. Place stems in a container of water (a vase or canning jar) that holds them snugly, leaves above the rim.
3. Cover leaves loosely with a plastic bag, such as a produce bag.
4. Refrigerate, changing water when it looks murky. Snip off any parts of stems that show sign of decay. If you're storing several jars, group them in a close-fitting rimmed container to try to protect them from being knocked over.

How long can you expect to keep those fresh herbs fresh? Basil will last on the counter top for up to 31 days. In the refrigerator, chervil stays fresh for 8 days, chives for 9, cilantro up to 14, dill for 9, parsley up to 21 and tarragon for up to 17 days.

Recipes

Flavored Vinegar

Flavored vinegars can be used to enliven the taste of sauces, glazes and marinades. Splash on fruits or use as a low-fat, low sodium flavor enhancer to drizzle on meats, fish, mushrooms and vegetables. Flavored vinegars are easy to make, add a distinctive touch to a range of dishes and make terrific gifts.

To create your own vinegar, start with a good commercial vinegar. Choose white wine vinegar if you are going to add delicate flavors such as thyme and mint. Apple cider vinegar compliments fruit flavorings.

For flavoring, use one or more of the following for each pint of vinegar: three or four sprigs of fresh herbs; 1 cup fresh ripe raspberries, strawberries, cranberries, pears or other fruit; 2 cloves coarse chopped peeled garlic; or the peel of an orange or lemon.

Place flavoring ingredients in pint jars (sterilized to prevent the vinegar from turning cloudy). Heat the vinegar to just below boiling and pour into jars. Cap the jars and let them stand undisturbed in a cool dark place so that flavors can develop and blend.

After 3 to 4 weeks, strain out the herbs and other ingredients and pour into sterilized, labeled containers.

Be sure to save some "taste of summer herbs" for your winter meals!

Herb Mixes

Below are some traditional herb mixes often used in cooking.

Herbes de Provence

Used in French cooking and characterized by rosemary and a hint of lavender.

- 2 teaspoons dried rosemary
- 2 teaspoons dried basil
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried savory
- 1 teaspoon dried tarragon
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried lavender
- 1 teaspoon dried marjoram
- 1 teaspoon cracked fennel seed

Herbes de Provence are used to season roasts of all sorts; add them to bouillabaisse or cioppino, and include them in quiches, savory tarts and other similar dishes.

Fines Herbes

Fines herbes refers to a combination of herbs that are used in Mediterranean cooking.

- 1 tablespoon tarragon
- 1 tablespoon chervil
- 1 tablespoon parsley
- 1 tablespoon chives

Use with eggs (e.g., omelets and soufflés), add to homemade chicken soup, sprinkle on a chicken before roasting or use on broiled fish such as tilapia and flounder.

Because dried parsley and dried chives don't have much flavor, it is best to use fresh herbs in the mixture.

Bouquet Garni

This is a bundle of herbs tied together with a string or put in a mesh bag. There is no generic recipe for bouquet garni, but most recipes include thyme and bay leaf. Depending on the recipe, a bouquet garni may also include parsley, basil, chervil, rosemary, peppercorns, savory and tarragon.

Bouquet garni is used to prepare soup, stock and various stews; it is cooked with the other ingredients but is removed before the dish is served.

Herb Butter

To make herb butter, simply add minced herbs to butter that has been allowed to warm to room temperature. For each ¼-pound stick use 4 tablespoons fresh or 2 tablespoon dried herbs and 1 teaspoon lemon juice or a few gratings of lemon zest. Add a little lemon juice and beat in a bowl or whirl in blender until fluffy and smooth. Place in covered container in refrigerator to mellow for 2 or 3 hours before using. Butter will keep several days in the refrigerator.

If you will be freezing the butter mixture, roll it in a cylinder, which can be easily sliced into serving sized portions. Or cut it into decorative shapes or mold in candy molds for a pretty presentation.

Pesto

Pesto, an uncooked seasoning that includes fresh basil, garlic, pine nuts and oil, must be refrigerated or frozen. There are no directions for canning pesto. Do not store in the refrigerator longer than 4 days. Freeze for longer storage.

Basic Basil Pesto

- 2 cups packed fresh basil leaves
- 2 cloves garlic
- ½ cup pine nuts
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- ¾ cup olive oil

Pulse all ingredients until combined. Add black pepper to taste.

Variations: Substitute other herbs for basil, such as cilantro, tarragon, mint, sage or dill. Other nuts such as almonds, pumpkin seeds, walnuts and cashews, can be substituted for pine nuts. Try lemon basil with almonds, cilantro with toasted pumpkin seeds, oregano with walnuts and mint with cashews.

www.uaf.edu/ces or 1-877-520-5211

Sarah R.-P. Lewis, Extension Faculty, Health, Home and Family Development. Originally prepared by Roxie Rodgers Dinstel, former Associate Director of Extension



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