



Healthy Cooking with Herbs and Spices



Whether you plant them or pick them up at the grocery store or farmers' market, adding fresh herbs is a quick way to transform ordinary meals into extraordinary meals.

Besides helping flavor foods when cutting back on salt, fat and sugar, herbs may offer additional benefits of their own. Researchers are finding many culinary herbs (both fresh and dried) have antioxidants that may help protect against such diseases as cancer and heart disease.



Herb or Spice?



What's the difference between a spice and an herb? Here are definitions of various seasonings from Ann A. Hertzler, PhD, RD, "Herbs and Spices," Virginia Cooperative extension:

- **Herbs** are leaves of low-growing shrubs. Examples are parsley, chives, marjoram, thyme, basil, caraway, dill, oregano, rosemary, savory, sage and celery leaves. These can be used fresh or dried. Dried forms may be whole, crushed or ground.
- **Spices** come from the bark (cinnamon), root (ginger, onion, garlic), buds (cloves, saffron), seeds (yellow mustard, poppy, sesame), berry (black pepper), or the fruit (allspice, paprika) of tropical plants and trees.
- Many **dehydrated vegetable seasonings** are available. These include onion, garlic...and shallots.
- **Seasoning blends** are mixtures of spices and herbs.

When Substituting Fresh Herbs for Dried Herbs



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. When substituting, you'll often be more successful substituting fresh herbs for dried herbs, rather than the other way around. For example, think potato salad with fresh vs. dried parsley!

How to Store Fresh Herbs

Fresh herbs can be stored in an open or a perforated plastic bag in your refrigerator crisper drawer for a few days. If you don't have access to commercial perforated bags, use a sharp object to make several small holes in a regular plastic bag. To extend the freshness of herbs, snip off the ends of the stems on the diagonal. Place herbs in a tall glass with an inch of water, like cut flowers. Cover them loosely with a plastic bag to allow for air circulation. Place them in the refrigerator and change the water daily. Herbs may last a week or more stored this way. Note: The flavor of herbs may diminish the longer they're stored.

How Long to Keep Spices and Herbs

Here are some guidelines to help you determine when it's time to toss your spices and herbs.

- 1 year for herbs or ground spices.
- 2 years for whole spices.

"A herb is the friend of physicians and the praise of cooks."- Charlemagne





When to Add Herbs During Food Preparation

Unlike dried herbs, fresh herbs are usually added toward the end in cooked dishes to preserve their flavor. 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. The less delicate herbs, such as dill seeds, oregano, rosemary, tarragon and thyme, can be added about the last 20 minutes of cooking. Obviously, for some foods, such as breads, batters, etc., you'll need to add herbs at the beginning of the cooking process.

Fresh herbs can be added to refrigerated cold foods several hours before serving. Allow time (at least a couple of hours, if possible) for cold foods with herbs to chill helps the flavors to blend.

Fat, Sugar And Salt Reduction Tips

Spices and herbs can help retain flavor in your foods while cutting back on dietary fat, sugar and sodium/salt.

Reducing Fat. By removing a tablespoon of fat will remove about 10 grams of fat and 100 calories – *which could represent a 10 pound weight loss in a year!* The calories in herbs and spices are far less than in breadings, batters, gravies, sauces and fried foods.

Reducing Sugar. Reduce or eliminate sugar by using these sweet-tasting spices.

Allspice	Cloves
Anise	Ginger
Cardamom	Mace
Cinnamon	Nutmeg

Reducing Salt. Here are some tips when using spices and herbs to help you reduce the salt in foods:

- Savory flavors, and flavors with “bite,” such as black pepper, garlic powder, curry powder, cumin, dill seeds, basil, ginger, coriander and onion, are the most effective in replacing the taste of salt, according to ASTA.
- Omit the salt when cooking pasta and flavor with basil, oregano, parsley and pepper or use an Italian seasoning blend.
- Use *powdered* garlic and onion rather than their *salt* form. Use half as much of the powdered form.
- Check labels to see if “salt” or “sodium” are listed among the ingredients.

Herb/Food Combinations

Here are some ideas to help you start combining fresh herbs with your foods.

BASIL - a natural snipped in with tomatoes; terrific in fresh pesto; other possibilities include pasta sauce, peas, zucchini

CHIVES – dips, potatoes, tomatoes

CILANTRO – Mexican, Asian and Caribbean cooking; salsas, tomatoes

DILL – carrots, cottage cheese, fish, green beans, potatoes, tomatoes

MINT – carrots, fruit salads, parsley, peas, tabouli, tea

OREGANO – peppers, tomatoes

PARSLEY – The curly leaf is the most common, but the flat-leaf or Italian parsley is more strongly flavored and often preferred for cooking. Natural for parsley include potato salad, tabouli

ROSEMARY – chicken, fish, lamb, pork, roasted potatoes, soups, stews, tomatoes

SAGE – poultry seasoning, stuffings

TARRAGON – chicken, eggs, fish

THYME – eggs, lima beans, potatoes, poultry, summer squash, tomatoes

WINTER SAVORY - dried bean dishes, stews

Storing Spices and Herbs



Use the following guidelines for storing your spices and herbs to maintain maximum quality. To prevent flavor and color loss, avoid moisture, light, heat and air.

Store in tightly covered containers.

Store in a dark place away from sunlight, such as inside a cupboard or drawer.

Avoid storage above the dishwasher, microwave, stove or refrigerator, or near a sink or heating vent.

If storing in an open spice rack, store in a site away from heat, light and moisture.

Avoid sprinkling dried spices and herbs directly from container into a steaming pot to prevent moisture from entering the container.

Use a dry spoon to measure spices and herbs from a container.

Keep these points in mind regarding refrigerator/freezer storage:

- Refrigerate paprika, chili powder and red pepper for best color retention, especially in summer or hotter climates.
- Spices and herbs can get wet if condensation forms when a cold container from a refrigerator or freezer is left open in a humid kitchen.