

AMP UP YOUR COOKING WITH HERBS

Susan Denzer, Chef and Culinary Consultant
www.loveandcraftkitchen.com

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KITCHEN



In terms of bang-for-your-flavor-buck, herbs are culinary powerhouses that can easily transform a dish from ordinary to delightful in no time flat. In fact, many dishes would not be the same at all without the use of at least a few herbs - pesto, salsa, pasta sauce, tabbouleh salad, or lavender syrup to name a few.

In addition to being a culinary staple, herbs have been used in natural medicine for ages. They are known to have several health and wellness benefits such as possessing antioxidant and anti-

inflammatory qualities, and providing essential vitamins A, C and K.

Herbs are usually categorized as either “hard” or “soft” for cooking purposes.

- Hard herbs are those that have sturdier, woody-like stems (such as rosemary, sage, and thyme) and are added early in the cooking process to infuse their aroma into the dish.
- Soft herbs have tender stems (such as basil, mint and parsley) are added near the end of cooking so they maintain more of their color and flavor, or as garnish. NOTE: Dried soft herbs should be added earlier in the cooking process so they reconstitute and infuse flavor into the dish.

SEASONALITY

Availability of fresh herbs can vary greatly by type and location, so check your local farmers market and talk with producers about herb seasonality for your area. Perennial varieties (such as mint, oregano, thyme, chives, winter savory, rosemary) can be produced and harvested year-round. Annual varieties (such as basil, cilantro, dill, summer savory, parsley, marjoram) are generally available during warm weather months.

Many grocery stores carry various fresh herbs year-round - look in the produce section. You may also wish to grow your own supply of herbs either outdoors or indoors in order to provide the freshest possible herbs for your cooking.

STORING AND CLEANING

Hard Herbs:

- Wrap in damp paper or cloth towel
- Loosely wrap in plastic wrap or place into an airtight container
- Store in refrigerator in crisper section
- Hard herbs last anywhere from 1 - 2 weeks

Soft Herbs:

- Trim the stem base and discard ends

- Place stems in a glass or water (similar to cut flowers)
- Store in the refrigerator or at room temperature (basil is best at room temperature)
- Change water every 1 - 2 days
- Soft herbs last anywhere from 3 - 7 days

Gently wash fresh herbs just prior to use, then pat dry. A salad spinner is a handy tool when cleaning herbs.

DRYING FRESH HERBS

Consider drying any surplus fresh herbs for later use. The drying process concentrates the flavor and the antioxidant and anti-inflammatory polyphenols.

For information on how to dry herbs, check out HGTV.com - [“How to Preserve Your Garden Herbs”](#).



USING FRESH VS DRIED

Some dishes truly shine with the use of fresh herbs (think salsa, pesto, salads, baking, beverages, etc.), yet dried herbs are oftentimes called for, or preferred, in recipes, and may be substituted for fresh (such as in soups and stews, marinades and rubs, braising, simmering, etc.).

Dried herbs release a more potent flavor than fresh herbs, so a smaller quantity is used in cooking. Just as with any seasoning, more can be added after cooking and tasting, if needed.

Start with a 3:1 ratio when using dried herbs instead of fresh herbs:
 3 teaspoons FRESH (or 1 tablespoon) = 1 teaspoon DRIED.

Store dried herbs in air-tight containers in a cool, dry place. Similar to fresh herbs, hard herbs tend to last longer once dried and soft herbs may last less time. Dried herb leaves and flowers will last anywhere from 3 months - 2 years, depending on the herb and storage conditions. If you do not smell the herb's unique aroma when you open the storage container, it is past its prime.



Check out this recipe on my website for [Savory Herb and Cheese Quick Bread](#).

Savor it as the French do, with an aperitif of Champagne or wine, or enjoy it as part of a brunch, lunch or dinner.