

Culinary Herbs

Christine Williams
Santa Fe Garden Club

QuickTime™ and a
TIF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

1. Definition
 - a. Annual, biennial or perennial that doesn't produce woody tissue
 - b. Any plant or plant part used for culinary, cosmetic, medicinal or aromatic properties
 - c. Spices tend to be more fragrant than herbs; herbs generally made of fresh or dried leaves; spices generally produced from flowers, fruit, seeds, roots or bark
 - d. In Great Britain, the 'h' is pronounced; in the U.S. it isn't
2. Growing culinary herbs
 - a. Herbs generally like neutral to alkaline soil, like NM's soil
 - b. Locate the herb garden as close to the kitchen door as possible
 - c. Most herbs need full sun; in the desert, some need afternoon shade; full sun produces darker, denser foliage and higher levels of essential oils
 - d. Bed design
 - i. Dedicated herb garden
 1. 10' x 12' garden serves an average family
 2. Some plant perennial herbs on one side and annuals on the other
 3. Tip: Be sure not to plant fennel and dill close together since hybridization produces seedlings with an indeterminate flavor
 - ii. Planted in the vegetable garden
 - iii. Planted among ornamentals in the landscape
 1. Drawback is that chopping off herbs can spoil the look of the ornamental garden
 - iv. Containers
 1. Allow at least 1 gallon of soil per plant
 2. Plant one type of herb per pot
 3. Only plant mint in containers because of its invasive nature
 - e. Soil preparation
 - i. Amend soil with compost and a balanced fertilizer each spring; make sure soil has good drainage
 - ii. Drip irrigation yields the best results
 - iii. Be sure to use culinary and not ornamental herb species
 - f. Herb types
 - i. Perennials
 1. Herbaceous – die back to the ground each winter (oregano, chives, sweet fennel, winter savory, mint)
 2. Evergreen (rosemary, sage, thyme)
 - ii. Annuals
 1. One growing season
 2. Plant new plants every 4 to 6 weeks during growing season to assure a steady supply
 3. Once an annual makes flowers, it's difficult to get it to return to leaf production

- g. Pruning
 - i. Prune often to encourage leafy growth
 - 1. Herbaceous herbs
 - a. Thoughtful pruning not necessary
 - b. Prune when harvesting, when cutting back to get rid of flowers, or at least at the end of the growing season
 - 2. Evergreen herbs
 - a. Prune late August/early September or early spring
 - b. Prune branches that are old and show no sign of new growth, those that are dead, and those that are lying on the ground or crossing other branches
 - c. When a branch becomes wood it produces little new growth; if there are shorter and healthier branches, the tall woody branches should be removed
- 3. Harvesting herbs
 - a. Herb leaves should be cut when the plant's stock of essential oils is at its highest
 - i. In the leafy herbs (basil, chervil, marjoram and savory) this occurs just before blossoming time
 - ii. Annuals can be cut down to 3 – 4 inches as many as 4 times during the outdoor growing season and get regrowth
 - iii. Perennials – take no more than 1/3 of the plant; harvest until late Aug. then stop one month before the season end to harden off for winter
 - b. Storing herbs
 - i. Store in an open or perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator crisper
 - ii. For longer storage – snip stem ends on the diagonal, place in a tall glass with 1 inch of water, and keep in refrigerator. Change water daily. Keep up to one week, but lose flavor.
 - iii. Washing
 - 1. Washing strips essential oils, so wash only when ready to use
 - 2. Wash under a faucet or for large amounts, fill sink and immerse herbs in water
 - 3. Shake off or put in the salad spinner
 - 4. Pat with paper towels
- 4. Preserving herbs
 - a. Drying: can be stored up to 1 year. Sturdy herbs such as sage, thyme, summer savory, dill, bay leaves, oregano, rosemary and marjoram are well-suited to air drying. Tender leaf herbs such as basil, tarragon, lemon balm and mint have a higher moisture content and can mold if not dried quickly
 - i. Air drying
 - 1. Bunch drying

- a. Good for long stemmed herbs such as marjoram, sage, savory, mint, parsley, dill, basil and rosemary
 - b. Wash as necessary in cold water, shake off excess water, pat dry and hang until water evaporates
 - c. Discard dead or yellowed leaves
 - d. Wrap small bunches with raffia or string, and hang in a dim, warm, dry, well-ventilated place not exposed to direct sunlight – a garage can be good
 - e. Hang leafy ends down so essential oils in the stems flow to the leaves
 - f. To prevent dust from collecting on leaves, place each bunch in a perforated paper bag before hanging, with herb stems hanging freely inside. This is also a good method for catching seeds from seed heads.
 - g. When leaves crisp and thoroughly dry, store in airtight container in dark closet
2. Tray drying
- a. Good for large – leaf herbs and chives and for drying seeds from dill, caraway, and coriander
 - b. Remove leaves from stems (optional)
 - c. Spread a single layer of leaves in a shallow-rimmed tray covered with cheesecloth – leaves on cheesecloth
 - d. Place tray in warm, dry, ventilated area not exposed to direct sunlight
 - e. Every few days, stir or turn leaves gently
 - f. When leaves are crisp and thoroughly dry, store in airtight container
- ii. Microwave oven drying
- a. Rinse herbs and remove all excess water so they don't cook instead of drying in the microwave
 - b. Place no more than 4-5 branches in the microwave, arranged between 2 paper towels
 - c. Microwave on high for 2-3 minutes, using extreme caution so herbs don't get scorched or catch fire
 - d. Remove herbs from microwave
 - e. If not brittle or dry, microwave on high another 30 seconds
 - f. Place herbs on rack and cool
 - g. Store in airtight container
 - h. Quality of flavor may not be as good as air drying
- iii. Oven drying
- a. Spread 1 layer of leaves on cookie sheet and place in 180 degree oven for 3-4 hours. Leave door open, and stir periodically until dry

- iv. Cool oven drying
 - a. Place single layer of leaves on paper towel
 - b. Cover with another paper towel – can do up to 5 layers
 - c. Dry in cool oven overnight – oven light of electric oven or pilot light of gas oven is sufficient to dry herbs
- b. Freezing – works best with tender leaf herbs such as basil, tarragon, lovage, parsley, and chives. Three methods to freeze herbs. In all three, rinse herbs quickly and shake off excess water. Frozen herbs should keep for 3 months. Be sure to label and date freezer bags.
 - i. Freezer bag method – wrap a few sprigs or leaves in freezer wrap and place in freezer bag. Seal and freeze. Chop and use in cooked dishes. Not suitable for garnishes.
 - ii. Ice cube tray method – cut herbs in tiny pieces and fill ice cube tray section half full with herbs. Cover herbs with cold water and freeze until solid. Transfer cubes to freezer bag, squishing out as much air as possible. Drop in soups, stews and sauces as needed.
 - iii. “Slurry” method – puree washed herbs in blender with small amount of water. Pour into ice cube trays and freeze. Transfer to freezer bag.
- 5. Cooking with herbs
 - a. Rule of thumb: when using fresh herbs, use 3 times as much as you would of dried herbs
 - b. For most recipes, mince herbs into tiny pieces with chef’s knife on cutting board or snip with scissors
 - c. Chiffonade – stack several leaves, roll into tight roll, then cut into thin strips with sharp knife
 - d. Normally, unless recipe calls for a sprig of herbs, the part of the herb used is the leaf
 - e. Be careful if using food processor – it can turn herbs into a paste
 - f. Fresh herbs are usually added toward the end in cooked dishes to preserve their flavor. Add delicate herbs – basil, chives, cilantro, dill leaves, parsley, marjoram and mint – a minute or two before the end of cooking. Less delicate herbs, such as dill seeds, oregano, rosemary, tarragon, and thyme can be added in the last 20 minutes of cooking. Fresh herbs can be added to refrigerated cold foods several hours before serving.

A few easy (I LOVE EASY!) recipes using herbs

Homemade Boursin Cheese

From Soupcon II (Chicago Junior League Cookbook)

(Best made a day ahead)

8 oz. cream cheese, softened
1 clove garlic, crushed
2 tsp. fresh minced parsley
½ tsp. dried basil leaves
2 T. chopped chives
1 T. dry white vermouth (I omit)
Pinch of lemon pepper

Blend cream cheese with garlic. Add remaining ingredients. Chill and serve with crackers. To make a dip for crudité's, add ½ C sour cream.

Chicken Marinade

1 C vegetable oil
½ C lemon juice
1 T. salt
1 tsp. paprika
2 tsp. dried basil
½ tsp. crushed thyme
1 clove garlic, crushed

Combine for marinade.

Garlic and Herb Tomatoes

From Barefoot Contessa At Home

3 T. good olive oil
2 tsp. minced garlic (2 cloves)
2 pints cherry tomatoes or grape tomatoes
2 T. chopped fresh basil, plus more for garnish
2 T. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, plus more for garnish
2 tsp. chopped fresh thyme leaves
1 tsp. kosher salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Heat the olive oil in a sauté pan large enough to hold all the tomatoes in one layer. Add the garlic to the oil and cook over medium heat for 30 seconds. Add the

tomatoes, basil, parsley, thyme, salt, and pepper. Reduce heat to low and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, tossing occasionally, until the tomatoes begin to lose their firm round shape. Sprinkle with a little fresh chopped basil and parsley and serve hot or at room temperature.

Cranberry Pork Tenderloin

Sunset, Nov. 2007

Makes 4 servings

2 T. olive oil, divided
1 pork tenderloin (about 1 lb.)
½ tsp. *each* coarse kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 small red onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ C reduced-sodium chicken broth
½ C whole-berry cranberry sauce (I use a can of Ocean Spray cranberry sauce)
2 tsp. minced fresh rosemary
1 T. balsamic vinegar

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large frying pan, heat 1 T. oil over medium-high heat. Season pork with salt and pepper; brown lightly all over, about 5 minutes.
2. Transfer pork to foil-lined 9 x 13 in. baking pan. Add remaining 1 T. oil to frying pan, reduce heat to medium, and add onion. Cook, stirring, until softened, 3 minutes. Add garlic; cook 1 minute, then pour in chicken broth, cranberry sauce, rosemary, and vinegar. Cook 2 minutes.
3. Pour hot cranberry sauce over pork and bake, uncovered, until an instant-read thermometer registers 160 degrees, about 20 minutes (it takes me longer with my oven). Let pork rest 10 minutes, then slice and serve with sauce. This makes plenty of sauce, so if you want to increase the amount of pork tenderloin you don't have to increase the sauce.

Asian Chicken

2 T. olive oil
2 T. butter
3 cloves garlic
1 bunch cilantro
2 + limes
1 jalapeno pepper
½-1 C white wine
2 lbs. chicken tenders
½ tsp. sugar
3 T. capers

In olive oil and butter, sauté chicken until cooked through. Add cilantro, jalapeno pepper, garlic, lime juice, and wine. Simmer 5-10 minutes and serve.

