

## Herbs

Culinary herbs are herbaceous (leafy) plants that add flavour and colour to all types of meals. The seeds, flowers, leaves or roots may be used. If you find that low fat or low salt foods taste bland, use herbs to enhance the flavour of any dish, including desserts. Generally, herbs are delicately flavoured, so add them to your cooking in the last few minutes. It helps to taste test. Using too few herbs will contribute nothing, while too many will overpower other ingredients.

### Health benefits

Herbs appear to play a role in preventing and managing heart disease, cancer and diabetes. While more research is needed to confirm their health benefits, some initial studies have shown:

- Garlic, linseed, fenugreek and lemongrass may help lower cholesterol.
- Garlic may be useful for people with mild hypertension.
- Garlic, onions, linseed and ginger may help inhibit blood clots.
- Fenugreek, linseed/flaxseed, cinnamon, garlic, onions, bay leaves, cloves, cumin and turmeric may help improve glucose control or insulin activity.
- Garlic, onions, chives, leeks, mint, basil, oregano, sage, thyme, rosemary, parsley, linseed, ginger, turmeric, dill, celery, coriander, fennel, cumin, anise and caraway may help protect against cancer.
- Most herbs - especially rosemary, sage, oregano, thyme and onions - can act as antioxidants to protect LDL cholesterol from being oxidised and they can inhibit blood clots and provide anti-inflammatory and anti-tumour activity.

### Herbs can be added to virtually any recipe

Culinary herbs shouldn't be confined to main meals, such as the perennial rosemary lamb roast. Herbs can be used in a variety of ways, including in:

- Soups
- Breads
- Mustards
- Marinades
- Butters
- Sauces
- Salad dressings
- Stocks
- Vinegars
- Vinaigrettes
- Desserts
- Drinks
- Confectionary.

### Cooking with herbs

Suggestions for cooking with herbs include:

- For preparing fresh herbs, use scissors, a sharp knife and a chopping board.
- For preparing dried herbs, use a grinding mill or a pestle and mortar.
- Use wooden utensils when mixing prepared herbs.
- Dried herbs are more strongly flavoured than fresh. As a general rule, one teaspoon of dried herbs equals four teaspoons of fresh.

- If you regularly use herbs, prepare your own 'bouquet garni' sachets for easy use later. Parcel your chopped and mixed herbs in little muslin bags for later use.
- Unlike other herbs, parsley retains its flavour during the cooking process and can be added at the start.
- Fresh herbs have a more pungent flavour, as oils and nutrients are lost in the drying process.
- The flavour of herbs diminishes with time; discard dried herbs after 12 months.
- Dried whole herbs, where the leaves are still attached to their stalk, tend to have a stronger flavour than loose leaves sold in packets/bottles.

## Good herb and food combinations

Try combining these herbs and foods:

- **Basil** - pesto, tomato sauce, tomato soup, tomato juice, potato dishes, prawns, meat, chicken and poultry, pasta, rice, egg dishes.
- **Bay** - soups, stews, casseroles, meat and poultry marinades, stocks.
- **Chilli** - meat, chicken and poultry, shellfish, tomato dishes, curries.
- **Chives** - salads, chicken, soups, cheese dishes, egg dishes, mayonnaise, vinaigrettes.
- **Coriander** - Asian dishes, stir fries, curries, soups, salads, seafood.
- **Dill** - salads, sauces, fish, sour cream, cheese and potato dishes.
- **Fennel** - stuffings, sauces, seafood.
- **Garlic** - soups, sauces, pasta, meat, chicken, shellfish, pesto, salad dressings, bread.
- **Ginger** - cakes, biscuits, Asian dishes.
- **Lemongrass** - Asian dishes, stir fries, curries, seafood, soups, tea.
- **Marjoram** - meat, fish, egg dishes, cheese dishes, pizza.
- **Mint** - drinks, confectionary, meat, chicken, yoghurt, desserts, sauces, vegetable dishes.
- **Oregano** - cheese dishes, egg dishes, tomato sauce, pizza, meat, stuffing, bread, pasta.
- **Parsley** - pesto, egg dishes, pasta, rice dishes, salads, butter, sauces, seafood, vegetable dishes.
- **Rosemary** - fish, poultry, meat, bread, sauces, soups.
- **Sage** - stuffings, tomato dishes, cheese dishes.
- **Tarragon** - salad dressing, egg dishes.
- **Thyme** - chowders, bread, chicken and poultry, soups, stock, stews, stuffings, butter, cheese, mayonnaise, mustard, vinegar.

## Herb combinations

Try two or more of these herb combinations (perhaps when preparing your bouquet garni sachets):

- **Basil** - with chives, chilli, garlic, oregano.
- **Bay** - with parsley, thyme, garlic, oregano, marjoram.
- **Chilli** - with coriander, garlic, ginger, lemongrass, mint, oregano.
- **Chives** - with basil, garlic, tarragon.
- **Dill** - with chives, garlic, parsley, tarragon.
- **Garlic** - with basil, rosemary, sage, fennel, chilli, coriander.
- **Oregano** - with basil, parsley, chives, thyme, bay, chilli.
- **Sage** - with rosemary, garlic, marjoram.
- **Thyme** - with bay, parsley, garlic, rosemary.

## Be adventurous

Herbs can be used with artistic licence. If a recipe calls for herbs you don't have, use a combination of others. The more you use herbs, the more adventurous you will become.

## Where to get help

- Greengrocer
- Supermarket
- Nursery.

## Things to remember

- Culinary herbs are herbaceous plants that add flavour and colour to all types of meals.
- If you find that low fat or low salt foods taste bland, use herbs to enhance the flavour of virtually any dish, including desserts.
- Generally, herbs are delicately flavoured, so add them to your cooking in the last few minutes.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

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