
Herbs

Summary

- 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.
 - Fresh herbs are generally delicately flavoured, so add them to your cooking in the last few minutes.
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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, herbs can be used 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. If not enough herbs are added, then little difference will be made to the flavour of the dish, whereas if too many herbs are added, their flavour will overpower other ingredients.

Health benefits of herbs

Consuming herbs may help to prevent and manage heart disease, cancer and diabetes. While more research is needed to confirm their medicinal and health benefits, some initial studies have shown that:

- Garlic, linseed, fenugreek and lemongrass may help lower cholesterol.
 - Garlic is useful for people with mildly elevated blood pressure.
 - Herbs such as fenugreek, linseed, flaxseed and cinnamon can help control blood sugar and insulin activity.
 - Garlic, onions, chives, leeks, mint, basil, oregano, sage and many other herbs can help protect against
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cancer.

- Herbs are rich in antioxidants, especially cloves, cinnamon, sage, oregano and thyme, by helping to reduce low-density lipoproteins ('bad' cholesterol).

Fresh herbs often contain higher antioxidant levels compared to processed or dried herbs. They can also help to reduce blood clots and can provide anti-inflammatory and anti-tumour properties.

Cooking with herbs

Herbs can be added to virtually any recipe, including:

- soups
- breads
- mustards
- marinades
- butters
- sauces
- salad dressings
- stocks
- vinegars
- vinaigrettes
- desserts
- drinks.

Good herb and food combinations

Try adding herbs to foods, for example:

- **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, guacamole
- **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, confectionery, 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.

Tips for cooking with herbs

Suggestions for cooking with herbs include:

- 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, tie chopped and mixed herbs in little muslin bags (called bouquet garni) to add flavour to your cooking.
- Some herbs, like rosemary and parsley, retain their flavour during the cooking process and can be added at the start.
- The flavour of herbs fades with time, so 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 or jars.

Herb combinations

Try two or more herb combinations (perhaps when preparing your bouquet garni sachets), such as:

- **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 with herbs

Herbs can be used in lots of different ways. If a recipe calls for herbs you do not 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.
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- Fresh herbs are generally delicately flavoured, so add them to your cooking in the last few minutes.

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

Deakin University - School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences

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