

Extension

January 2012 Newsletter

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Healthy Cooking with Herbs

Anne Zander, CSU Family & Consumer Science Extension Agent

Adding herbs is a quick way to change ordinary meals into special meals. Besides adding flavor to foods, great for when you're trying to cut back on salt, fat and sugar, herbs have health benefits of their own. Researchers are finding that many herbs have antioxidants that may help protect against such diseases as cancer and heart disease.

Take some "thyme" to cook with fresh herbs. Here are some tips to help you enjoy the flavor and health benefits of herbs in your cooking.



When Substituting Fresh Herbs for Dried Herbs

When using fresh herbs in a recipe, use 3 times as much as you would use of a dried herb. When substituting, you will be more successful substituting fresh herbs for dried herbs, rather than the other way around.

How to Store and Wash Fresh Herbs

Fresh herbs can be stored in an open or a perforated plastic bag in your refrigerator drawer for a few days. If you don't have access to commercial perforated bags, use a knife or scissors to make several small holes in a regular plastic bag.

Wash herbs when you are ready to use them. Wash herbs thoroughly under running water. Shake off moisture or spin dry in a salad spinner and pat off any remaining moisture with clean paper towels.

How to Prepare Herbs for Cooking

For most recipes, unless otherwise directed, mince herbs into tiny pieces. Chop with a knife on a cutting board or snip with a kitchen scissors. While some recipes call for a sprig or sprigs of herbs, normally the part of the herb you harvest will be the leaves. For herbs with sturdier stems, such as marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage and thyme, you can strip off the leaves by running your fingers down the stem from top to bottom. For herbs with tender stems, such as parsley and cilantro, snip the stem in with the leaves.

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.

Herb/Food Combinations

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, tea
OREGANO	peppers, tomatoes
PARSLEY	parsley is one of those “superfoods” that can be used with a wide variety of foods.
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

Source: Alice Henneman, MS, RD, UNL Extension Educator

Let's Talk:

The New Year is a good time to try new things—especially if they're healthy and easy to do, like cooking with herbs. Caution, some children reject all things green such as vegetables and herbs. If this is the case, remove a portion of the food before adding herbs. Ask children to close their eyes and taste test the food both with and without herbs and let them pick what they like best, or try adding herbs to dark colored foods like tomato sauce, taco meat or beef stew. Either way, exposing children to a variety of foods, even herbs, helps them get a variety of healthy nutrients each day.

Recipe for Health:

Parsley Pesto: A Go-To Sauce for Winter Cooking

Pesto tastes great on pasta, chicken, rice, fish and vegetables. Or, try spreading it on sliced French bread before broiling. It's affordable and easy to make in winter or anytime.

Pesto Parsley

- 3 cups loosely packed parsley (stems included)
- 3 cups loosely packed cilantro (stems included)
- 2 med. cloves garlic, minced
- 1 – 2 Tbsp. minced jalapeno pepper (to taste)
- 2 Tbsp. freshly squeezed lime juice (about 1 large lime)
- 1-2 tsp. red wine vinegar, to taste
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 1 large orange, skin and membranes removed, diced to ¼”

Combine everything but orange pieces in food processor and pulse three or four times until fairly well blended, but not mushy. Pour into a small serving bowl and stir in orange pieces. Taste and add more jalapeno, lime, vinegar and/or salt and pepper, to taste. Now put this pesto on some brown rice or pasta and start your New Year off Healthy.

Source: Mary Collette Rogers

