



## Tips for Buying & Using

# Fresh Herbs

Written by:

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*Michigan-grown herbs are available between April and October.*

### Selection

Fresh-cut herbs should be free from soil and cooled or refrigerated. Potted herbs should look healthy. Look for firm leaves that aren't wilted, have no black spots and are free of insects. They should still have a strong aroma.

### How much to buy

Typically herbs are sold in bunches. So estimating how much your family will use right away is important. One bunch for using right away typically will suffice. If you plan to dry or preserve herbs, then you may wish to purchase several bunches.

### Storage

Herbs have a very short shelf life. Most should be refrigerated and can last about a week. Some herbs, such as garlic, can be stored on the counter or in a cupboard. If dried, extracted or frozen, herbs can be stored for up to a year. Store all herbs in oil infusions in the refrigerator. Potted plants should be cared for and set in an appropriate

place as required by the plants' growing needs.



### How to serve

- Always wash fresh produce thoroughly under running water before using. Do not use soap.
- Eat fresh in salads.
- Add to your favorite recipes.
- Dry and store or use as potpourri.
- Make flavored oil or vinegar.

### Nutrition

When herbs are used as flavoring or as an aromatic, they have little or no nutritive value.

Herbs do contain a variety of nutritive properties, however. Many have antioxidant properties, and many can be used for their medicinal properties.

### Preserving

Drying is a traditional way of preserving herbs, but herbs can also be frozen, or the flavor can be extracted in an oil or vinegar.

### Drying

Make sure the herbs are clean and the ends trimmed. To dry them, tie them into bundles and hang the bundles upside-down to air dry, or put them in paper bags or dry them in a food dryer.

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They can be woven into an herb wreath and hung in the kitchen to be used as needed. Some herbs do well when they are quick dried in a microwave and then stored in a freezer. Oven drying is also a good technique for drying herbs.

### Freezing

Many herbs can be frozen without problems and retain their freshness when thawed. Always wash and trim before freezing. Some of the hardier herbs — such as sage, rosemary and thyme — can be frozen right on the stalk. Just tear off what you need. Others should be steamed or blanched in boiling water for a minute or two, then cooled quickly in ice water and drained thoroughly. Put them in packages, label and freeze.

Tender herbs such as basil, parsley and chives can be minced or pureed with a small amount of water in a blender, then poured into freezer bags or into ice cube trays. Transfer frozen cubes to freezer storage bags or containers. Add these flavor cubes to your favorite soup or sauce.

### Infusions

Place your herb in a bottle and add enough olive oil (regular or extra virgin olive oil) or white vinegar to cover and let sit for four to six weeks in the refrigerator. Use as needed or pour into smaller bottles for added convenience, or to give as gifts to family and friends.

### Fresh herb tips

Fresh herbs smell stronger than dried herbs but do not taste as strong. Use more fresh herbs in recipes that call for dried herbs — typically three times more (i.e., 1 tsp. dried translates into 3 tsp. fresh).



## Recipe

### *Italian Herbed Butter*

Herbed butter is one of the easiest herbal recipes and can really add some zing as a topping, spread or addition to sauces.

#### Ingredients

- 1 pound salted butter, softened
- 1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
- 2 cloves minced fresh garlic
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh basil
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

#### Directions

Combine all ingredients in a mixing bowl. Beat by hand or with a mixer until well blended. Cover and store in the refrigerator. For butter that is easier to spread, whip the butter before adding the other ingredients.

## Web sites for more information

Check out the following Web sites for more information.

#### *About drying herbs:*

- [http://web.aces.uiuc.edu/vista/pdf\\_pubs/dryherbs.pdf](http://web.aces.uiuc.edu/vista/pdf_pubs/dryherbs.pdf)
- <http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/dry/herbs.html>
- <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8111.html>

#### *About freezing herbs:*

- <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8111.html>
- <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/family/facts/freezeherbs.htm>

#### *About herb infusions:*

- [http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fch/sites/default/files/documents/sp\\_50-701\\_herbs\\_and\\_vegetables\\_in\\_oil\\_2009.pdf](http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fch/sites/default/files/documents/sp_50-701_herbs_and_vegetables_in_oil_2009.pdf)