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Using Fresh Herbs In A Variety of Ways

By Mary Hanna

Herbs are fun and easy to grow. When harvested they make even the simplest meal seem like a gourmet delight. By using herbs in your cooking you can easily change the flavors of your recipes in many different ways, according to which herbs you add. Fresh herbs are great in breads, stews, soups or vegetables. Every time you add a different herb you have completely changed the taste.

If you are a beginner start slowly, add just a little at a time adjusting as you go along until you have it just right. You will see in most instances that an individual herb is associated with a particular food item. Basil is paired with tomatoes, Oregano with sauces, Rosemary with lamb and Chives with butter or cream cheese. Of course, none of them are limited to these items, but you will see them paired most often with that particular food. Use your imagination and experiment, experiment, experiment!

You can make herb vinegars for salad dressings, marinades, or soups. Herb oils are very useful in cooking whenever a recipe calls for it.

Fresh herbs as garnishes dress up any dish making it look truly spectacular. Lay individual sprigs of rosemary over broiled lamb chops. Chop fresh parsley and sprinkle it over the top of your potato salad. The combinations are endless and the outcome delicious.

Fresh herbs will keep in the refrigerator for several days but then you must freeze them. They can be frozen by laying them a paper towel and putting them in a plastic bag. Once they are frozen only use them in cooking not as garnishes. A friend of mine washes them, puts them an ice cube tray, covers them with water and then freezes them. When she needs them for soup, stews or sauces she just drops a cube in.

My favorite herbs to grow are basil, oregano, lemon balm, parsley and mint. Mint is great but be careful, mint can over run your garden. A tip here would be to bury an empty coffee can and plant the mint in it. The can prevents the mint from "creeping" all through your garden.

I love to make herb butters. Take a half of a cup of softened butter and mix in about 4 tablespoons of a fresh herb. Lay out a piece of saran wrap, place the butter in the middle roll the saran wrap up to form

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a "log" out of the butter. Put in the refrigerator and anytime you need a pat of butter just cut it off the "log". (Hints for "log" butter: potatoes, bread, steaks, noodles or any kind of sauce).

A fresh herb in any salad dressing really makes it sparkle. You can use any herb or a combination, be creative.

I learned a trick a long time ago using basil, lemon and avocados to create an instant natural face mask. Put a big handful of basil in a blender and run it on high. Once the basil has been pulverized, throw in a half of an avocado and a large teaspoon of lemon juice, mix until smooth. Wash your face, pat it dry and gently rub the avocado mixture on. Leave it on as long as you like, then use warm water to wash it off.

These are just a few ways you can use fresh herbs from your garden. I am sure you will come up with many more. Happy planting.

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Growing Your Own Herbs for Tea

By Cyndi Roberts

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If you love herbal teas, as I do, you know they are just a little bit pricey. However, growing your own herbs is easy and so much fun!

Here are just a few of the herbs you might want to consider for a tea garden:

Chamomile: Remember the favorite tea of Peter Rabbit? Only the flowers of this fragrant herb are used when making tea. Chamomile tea can be enjoyed by itself or you might enjoy adding mint or lemon verbena.

Lemon Balm: This herb is lemony with a touch of mint and makes a soothing cup of tea. It's easy to grow (almost too easy) so remember to keep it clipped back.

Lemon Verbena: An excellent herb to grow in a sunny spot, it makes a delicious tea. You might try combining it with orange mint or spearmint.

Mints: There are many mints available. Generally, they are aromatic plants and they are aggressive. It may be a good idea to plant mint in a pot and then put the pot in the ground so it doesn't take over your herb garden. Spearmint, peppermint, orange mint all make wonderful teas, alone or along with chamomile or any of the lemon herbs.

Herb teas can be made with fresh or dried herbs and can be enjoyed either hot or cold.

For one cup of hot tea, use one teaspoon of dry herbs or up to 3 teaspoons of fresh herbs. Bruising the leaves of fresh herbs will help release the flavor. Pour boiling water over the herbs in a glass or china pot. Metal pots can sometimes leave a metallic taste. Let steep for 5 or so minutes. Strain and enjoy with a little honey to sweeten.

Sun tea can be made simply by filling a jar with water, throw in a handful of crushed fresh herbs, and set in the sun for 3 or 4 hours. Stir in a little honey to sweeten, pour over ice and enjoy.

Trying different combinations of herbs is fun. Remember you can also add spices you have on hand, such as cinnamon, cloves, etc.

There are many benefits to growing and making your own herbal teas. Gardening itself is very relaxing and rewarding. With herbs from your garden you can soothe away your troubles with a cup of chamomile tea or make yourself a refreshing cup of peppermint tea after a hard day at work.

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Look in the perfumes of flowers and nature for peace of mind and joy of life. --Wang Wei

Cyndi Roberts' website, "1 Frugal Friend 2 Another" will show you ways to save money everyday. Receive a free e-course on saving money at the supermarket! To learn more, visit

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