UK COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY — COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Cooking with Herbs

Why do you eat? Most people eat because they enjoy good food. Although nutrition, appearance, and texture are important, the seasoning of food is one of the cook's most critical tasks. The **Super Star Chef** knows that cooking with herbs is an excellent way to give extra interest to the natural flavor of food without using extra fat or sodium. Whether fresh or dried, herbs come in a wide array at your local farmers market. With a little experience, cooking with herbs will be a snap!

Experimentation with different combinations of herbs will enable you to use less salt, experience unique flavors, and still have delicious dishes. Herbs are not meant to replace the flavor of the food, but to enhance natural flavors.

To select herbs, choose fresh, undamaged leaves that have a nice aroma. Use herbs as soon as possible, as the flavor and aroma are lost with storage.

For best results, chop or mince herbs before cooking. Volatile oils are released when the leaves are bruised, which provides their unique flavors. Heat increases the rate that herbs release their flavors.

For dishes that require a long cooking time, add delicate-flavored and ground herbs at the end of the cooking time so their flavor will not escape with the steam.

Some herbs, such as bay leaves, require longer cooking times. Herbs placed in a cheesecloth bag allows the extraction of flavors during cooking and easy removal of the herbs before serving.

If you are substituting dried herbs for fresh, use about one-third of the amount of fresh herbs called for in the recipe. For example, 1 tablespoon of a chopped, fresh herb is equal to 1 teaspoon of the same dried herb.

To add herbs to uncooked foods, such as salad dressings or marinades, add several hours in advance or overnight, to allow the flavors to blend with all the ingredients in the recipe.

The last step in most recipes should be to adjust the seasoning. With a little practice, you can evaluate your dish and decide what should be done, if anything, to improve the taste. A little creativity can allow you to season healthier by cooking with herbs. Because your meals will be so delicious, you and your family will be more likely to stick to a nutritious diet. So give growing, preserving, and using herbs a try.

Hints for Using Herbs

Herb	Uses
Basil	Goes well with fish, shellfish, and vegetables such as tomato, zucchini, and eggplant.
Chives	Use in fish dishes, soups, salad dressings, and on baked potatoes or steamed vegetables. Chives taste better when preserved by freezing rather than drying.
Dill	A mild herb that is excellent in yogurt sauces, rice dishes and soups. Goes well with fish and vegetables such as cucumbers and carrots.
Oregano	Essential to Italian cuisine, oregano is found in most tomato sauces and Italian dishes. Use in salad dressings, soups, or bean and vegetable dishes. Oregano tastes best dried.
Rosemary	Use this strong, fragrant herb when making roasted potatoes or chicken, homemade bread, soups, rice, and marinades.
Parsley	Use parsley dishes to spice up salads, soups, bean dishes, fish, and vegetables such as tomatoes, artichokes, and zucchini. Fresh parsley is preferred over dried parsley.
Thyme	An aromatic herb that goes well with poultry, seafood, and many bean and vegetable dishes including eggplant, tomatoes, mushrooms, squash, and onions.