

Fresh Herbs: a Picture of Healthy Eating



Alice Henneman, MS, RD
University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension Educator

Joanne Kinsey, MS
Rutgers Cooperative Extension/Rutgers University
Family & Community Health Sciences Educator/Assistant Professor



Whether you plant them or pick them up at the grocery store or farmers' market, adding fresh herbs is a quick way to transform ordinary meals into extraordinary meals.

Besides helping flavor foods when cutting back on salt, fat and sugar, herbs may offer additional benefits of their own. Researchers are finding many culinary herbs (both fresh and dried) have antioxidants that may help protect against such diseases as cancer and heart disease.

A snip of a fresh herb into a dish instantly kicks up the appearance a notch!

Unless directed otherwise by your recipe, add the more delicate herbs — basil, chives, cilantro, dill leaves, parsley, 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 oregano, rosemary, and thyme, can be added about the last 20 minutes of cooking.



Top a baked potato with a dollop of yogurt and a sprinkling of chives or parsley. Compare the potato without an herb topping and you can see the difference!

Experience what a difference in appearance and flavor fresh herbs can make. Better yet ... they do this without adding extra calories! For example, top a baked potato with a dollop of yogurt and a sprinkling of chives or parsley.



Many herbs, such as chives, can easily be grown in a container or garden.

Substituting Fresh Herbs for Dried Herbs

A general guideline when using fresh herbs in a recipe is to use 3 times as much as you would use of a dried herb. When substituting, you'll often be more successful substituting fresh herbs for dried herbs, rather than the other way around. For example, think potato salad with fresh versus dried parsley!



If you have extra herbs, enjoy herbal bouquets.

When to Pick or Purchase Herbs

Purchase herbs close to the time you plan to use them. When growing herbs in your own garden, the ideal time for picking is in the morning after the dew has dried but before the sun gets hot. This helps ensure the best flavor and storage quality.

How to Store Fresh Herbs

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

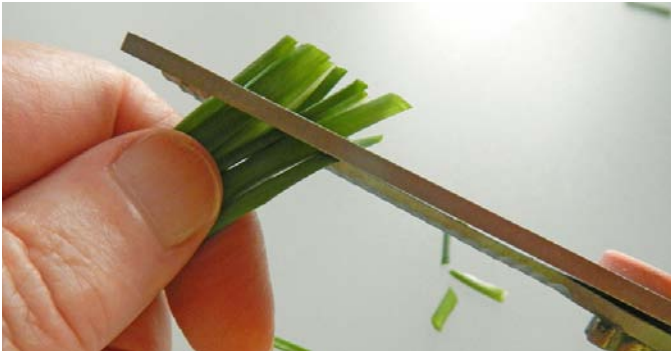
If you have more herbs than you can eat, enjoy herbal bouquets throughout your house. You can use either single herbs, combinations of herbs, or you can use the herbs as greenery mixed in with other flowers. To help preserve the aroma and color of your herb bouquets, place them out of direct sunlight.

Popular Herb and 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, tabbouleh, tea
OREGANO	peppers, tomatoes
PARSLEY	The curly leaf is the most common, but the flat-leaf or Italian parsley is more strongly flavored and often preferred for cooking. Naturals for parsley include potato salad, tabbouleh, egg salad sandwiches
ROSEMARY	chicken, fish, lamb, pork, roasted potatoes, soups, stews, tomatoes
SAGE	beef, chicken, potatoes, pork, carrots, summer squash
THYME	eggs, lima beans, potatoes, poultry, summer squash, tomatoes

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Use These Techniques for Chopping Herbs



Photos: Alice Henneman, UNL Extension in Lancaster County

Chives:

- Quickly snip small bundles of chives with a kitchen scissors OR
- Cut bundles on a cutting board with a very sharp chef's knife



Cilantro, parsley and other small-leaved delicate herbs:

- Remove leaves (OK to include some tender stems)
- Bunch on cutting board
- Place fingertips on tip of a chef's knife and rock blade briefly back and forth. Re-gather leaves and chop again if a smaller size is desired.



Thyme, oregano, rosemary, tarragon and other sturdy stemmed, small-leaved herbs:

- Hold thumb and index finger together; run down the stem in the opposite direction the leaves have grown.
- Chop the same as other herbs, if desired.

Basil, mint, sage and other large, leafy herbs – a technique called “chiffonade” can be used:



- Stack 5 or 6 leaves, and roll tightly



- Cut crosswise



- This method cuts herbs into narrow ribbons

Fresh Herb Garnishes

Edible fresh herb garnishes add appealing color, plus flavor and added nutrients to foods. Here are some foods that pair well with herb garnishes:

- Soups
- Salads
- Vegetables
- Desserts
- Beverages
- Protein dishes
- Fruits
- Grains

The following photos give ideas how different forms of various herbs can be used in foods.



Chives (stems)



Mint (with fruit)



Chives (flowerettes)



Parsley (chopped)



Basil (leaf)



Dill (chopped)



Parsley (leaves of flat-leafed parsley)



Basil (chiffonade)



Dill (small, tender sprig)



Thyme (individual tiny leaves)



Chives (chopped)



Mint (in smoothie)



Thyme (young thyme with tender, edible stems)

Photos by Alice Henneman unless otherwise credited

Mike Carroll, <http://flic.kr/p/6NTJWK>

Yugo Q, <http://flic.kr/p/KLGRFR>

Ied Major, <http://flic.kr/p/6u6EaB>

Jennifer, <http://flic.kr/p/cozMr3>

Alpha, <http://flic.kr/p/9wzsf0>

Brucolage 108, <http://flic.kr/p/PUlqq>

Blue moon in her eyes, <http://flic.kr/p/9uCRW1>