

Life Cycle

Herbs live according to one of three distinctly different timetables: annual, perennial, or biennial.

- An *annual* is any plant that can be sown from seed and will mature to harvest stage within one growing season. Left outside into winter, both plant and root structure will be killed by freezing temperatures or even a light frost. Many of our most familiar culinary herbs are annuals-basil, chervil, coriander, dill, summer savory.
- A *perennial* is a plant that comes back every spring. The plant itself may be killed by frost, but the root structure is hardy and, after hibernating for the winter, it sends up new shoots at the start of spring. Mints, thyme, tarragon, sage, and oregano are all hardy perennials.
- *Tender perennials*, such as rosemary, bay, and lemon verbena, can withstand a frost but not substantial freezing, so for practical purposes they must be treated as annuals in the garden or brought indoors in pots over the winter months, then returned to the garden in the spring.
- A *biennial* is a plant that takes 2 years to mature. Its root structure survives the first winter it spends outdoors, but when the plant goes to seed in the second growing season, it has outlived its usefulness. Parsley is the most familiar of the relatively few biennial plants.



Climate Requirements

Life cycle and climate obviously are interrelated. Because all annuals are killed by frost, they are classified as tender. But some annual herbs are more tender than others. A windy, 40 ° F night will kill basil but not effect the dill plant right next to it. Both are annuals, but basil is very tender and dill is not.

Most perennials are hardy, but some don't survive the winter intact because their root structures die in severe cold weather. On the other side some perennials, like French tarragon, don't do well in the *absence* of a cold winter.

Sunlight is important to all herbs to varying degrees. Some will tolerate partial shade, but few will really do well in total shade for long. Most herbs, which after all originated in Mediterranean countries, achieve their best growth in full sun. It is the long hours of sunlight that force the herbs to produce the oils that give them their unique aromas and flavors in the first place.

Rate and Pattern of Growth

Knowing the size, shape, and spreading pattern of each herb is indispensable to a successful garden plan. Think of herb gardening as landscape architecture practiced on a small scale. Each herb must be located to complement its neighbors and not get in the others' way. Illustrations accompanying this chapter depict the growth patterns, above and below ground, of eight representative herb plants.



Perennials must be given more room from the start, because they are permanent garden residents which grow larger every year. Some perennials grow on a single stem, others via an underground network of roots and new shoots. It is the latter—the spreading perennials—that must be watched carefully, and periodically dug up and divided to keep them within bounds. A single mint plant left untended in good growing conditions will spread 5' in every direction within 3 years.

You must also consider an individual herb's potential for growing tall or wide, above ground. Herbs such as angelica, lovage, or Jerusalem artichoke, which reach 6' in height, should be located at the back of the garden so they won't cast shade over shorter plants. Sage can get to 4 feet wide after several years, but may be kept in place by cutting back periodically.

Some herbs, such as parsley or chives, grow effectively in rows, and others, such as *Teucrium* (germander) and *Santolina*, can be trained into low hedges; for example, in formal knot gardens.

Certain herbs have an almost freakish rate of growth. Borage plants will crowd out their neighbors in a matter of weeks in early spring if you haven't allocated enough space to them. Bee balm and lemon verbena start slowly in the spring but bush out dramatically in summer if left untended.

Means of Propagation

The four proven ways to coax new herbs into life are from seed sown by the gardener, from cuttings of stems or branches, from divisions of root systems, or from seed dropped by the plant itself (self-sowing).

Most annuals are started from seed, a relatively easy method. These herbs can be sown directly into the designated area in the garden or planted as seedlings after having been started from seed in planting pots or trays indoors. This indirect sowing method is useful in northern climates to get a jump on the season.

Some perennials can also be started from seed, but it is easier, with single-stemmed perennials, to take cuttings off an existing healthy plant and place the branch in a sand/perlite mixture. Properly watered and given enough light, this shoot will send out new roots in a short while.

It is even easier to propagate spreading perennials, such as those in the mint family. By digging up the root system of an established plant, one can divide the roots into as many new plants as needed.

Finally, there are the herbs that produce their own seed in the course of the growing season and, with a little luck, sow their seed in and around the area of the original plant. Annuals, such as *dill*, and perennials, such as *oregano* or *lemon balm*, commonly produce these so-called volunteers, which make their appearance in the garden the following spring. *Cilantro* with its hard shell is a great self-sower.

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Ten Best Herbs to Grow

1. **Basil, recommended: Purple Basil:** Is there a better flavor in the summer than fresh basil, tomato slices, fresh mozzarella and basil leaves, drizzled with a bit of balsamic vinegar? I can't imagine it. But the plant can get rather tall and large leafed so I turned to smaller colored varieties, and for sheer beauty I always recommend the darker purple varieties. You get all the smell and flavor of Sweet Basil and can be used anywhere basil is, but you also get the versatility for making vinegar that is rich red like burgundy wine and flower arrangements with this color rich plant. The purple crinkly leaves look smashing in a salad. Even specialty basil (*Ocimum Basilicum* 'Opal' or 'Purple ruffles'), are easy to grow.
2. **Dill, recommended Fernleaf:** The joy of dill rests in its beauty, aroma, flavor and gardener-friendly growing habits. You can plant it in the early spring with your first lettuces, and watch it bloom into beautiful umbrellas at summer's end. And if you leave them be, those seed heads seem perfectly designed to catch the first snows of winter and arrange themselves artfully even after every green, growing thing has turned brown and called it a wrap. Of course to do that you need to seed a crop about once every two weeks or everything will go to seed in July when it gets hot and nothing will be left in fall. Fernleaf Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) is a smaller version of traditional dill which makes it better in containers. It has all the same culinary uses including fish, salads and omelets.
3. **Thyme, recommended Lemon Thyme:** Thyme is found in cuisines around the world and has been a part of the human experience for thousands of years, allegedly propagated by the Romans in their march to annex the world. It likes growing in sunny, well-drained and even somewhat inhospitable locations and tastes like nothing else in the world. It likes to stew a bit before it lets go of its flavor, so, unlike many herbs, it's OK to throw it in at the beginning of a soup rather than adding it as a last flourish. It also has sweet little flowers that come in different shades depending on the variety you choose. I prefer lemon (*Thymus citriodorus*) and variegated lemon (*Thymus citriodorus variegata*) because they give me thyme's richness as well as a hint of lemon you can use in cooking wherever anything lemon is called for. It is so good when grilling chicken. This little herb can add depth of flavor to meat, chicken and egg dishes. It's also great fresh or dry. Add a pinch to stews and soups for a stronger and more complex stock.
4. **Chives, recommend both regular and Garlic Chives:** Chives are easy to grow, bloom once a season and make a grass-looking succulent evergreen plant that my cats love to nibble on. I use Chives' spring blossoms to make an onion-flavor vinegar and in the fall use the Garlic Chive blossoms (white) to make a garlic-flavored vinegar. These two plants (*Allium schoenoprasum* – regular; *Allium tuberosum* - garlic) will give you the flavor of onion and garlic without the need to grow onion and garlic sets and the need for the perfect sandy soil those sets require. They also give a more subtle sweet flavor you can use uncooked which is not always possible with raw garlic. A colorful and easy way to get a little garlicky and oniony goodness into salads, potato or egg dishes. Once you've tried them snipped fresh, you'll never resort to tasteless dried chives again.
5. **Scented Geraniums:** Not to be confused with the decorative varieties, these plants are in the Pelargonium family. The focus here is on the leaves which provide a powerful scent and come in varieties as vast as the imagination. You can get Chocolate, Mint, Rose, Lemon (of course) and sometimes combinations of two. One of my favorites is Robert's Lemon Rose (Pelargonium cv.) The soft fuzzy indented leaves are a bright green and when you just bump them they release their scent into the air. I keep them in pots on my patio for aroma therapy and along the walkway into and out of the house to welcome me and my guests.

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6. **Sage, recommended Tri-color Sage:** Although this is a pungent herb not all enjoy, I cannot imagine gardening without it. Tri-color sage has three colors irregularly patterned on the leaves, a green, a creamy yellow and a rich purple. The habit of Tri-color Sage is more compact than garden sage and it can be grown in a container. Sage oil, which I make on an as needed basis in the summer is great to marinade and baste grilled meats and vegetables. Tri-color (*Salvia officinalis* 'Tri-color') has a gentler flavor and a smaller growing habit, plus it is pretty. Since I never allow my herbs to flower (takes away from the flavor) I enjoy the various variegated and colored herbal varieties to give me unique focal points in my garden. Most commonly used in holiday stuffing, sage is a tasty herb to take advantage of all year long. Great in egg, fowl and vegetable medleys, a little sage goes a long way, so use restraint. It is perfect on poultry. It also makes a pretty garish and dries well in arrangements.
7. **Flat Parsley:** Flat parsley is in a different flavor class than traditional curly parsley, and the most popular ingredient in some of my favorite Italian dishes, it is also high in vitamins. My pasta in the summertime is more an excuse to serve parsley than a reason to eat noodles. With a gentle fresh taste you can make a Parsley Pesto and enjoy it every single day. *Petroselinum neapolitanum* is the scientific name, so make sure you get what you wanted. The best stocks and sauces use many ingredients to create deep flavor. Parsley is an herb that works great with basic stock ingredients, like onions, celery and carrots. Add a little parsley to your favorite stovetop meals just before serving and you'll see a garden fresh difference. Parsley also enhances other herb flavors.
8. **French Tarragon:** This herb has a little licorice-y underflavor, but an inviting aroma that is central to good French cuisine. Making vinegar from the fresh leaves gives you access to its unique flavor even in winter. A word of caution: Some nurseries don't know the distinction between French tarragon (*Artemisia dracuncululus* L.) and Russian tarragon (*A. dracunculoides* L.), a weedy and not wonderful plant with resinous flavor. You need to start French tarragon from cuttings or live plants, as it's very difficult to start from seed. Tarragon can transform fowl into a feast. For the best results, use fresh French tarragon. Make a marinade of tarragon, Dijon mustard, white wine and pepper. It'll enliven your chicken and wake up your taste buds.
9. **Rosemary, recommended Prostrate:** This evergreen shrub has a robust piney flavor and comes in many varieties. ARP and Musted are sold most in the Midwest because of a better ability to withstand our winters, but it still needs to be brought in or heavily sheltered each winter. I like the prostrate or creeping varieties (*Rosemarinus officinalis* 'Prostratus') because I can train them in a standard as a Christmas tree or put in hanging baskets. The flavor of fresh rosemary is so much less strident than dried, so try fresh to see the sweeter gentler side of this wonderful cooking herb. A must for lamb, rosemary is also a tasty accompaniment to potato dishes and strongly flavored meats. If you want to wake up your grilling, add a little fresh rosemary to the heating coals or use rosemary stems as kabob skewers.
10. **Lemon Verbena:** This little known and often ignored herb has many qualities that I want to bring to your attention. *Aloysia Triphyllia* is a deciduous shrub native to South and Central America. In Guatemala I stood next to a plant 3 to 4 feet taller than me, but here in Illinois I've never gotten more than 2 feet of height. However the flavor and scent of lemon these plants have is marvelous and unlike so many herbs, the dried leaves will keep that scent for years and years. You can cook with it, make iced and hot tea with it and use it in bath items as well. The tea is known to be mildly sedative. It is prone to spider mites, so check it carefully when bringing home a nursery plant. A quick spray of chive vinegar will eliminate a mild infestation.

6 EASY STEPS TO GROWING HERBS FROM SEEDS

1. **Preparation:** Start with a string of fluorescent shop lights -- we don't get enough sunshine to support those charming windowsill gardens you see in other climes. Add a shelf long enough to accommodate the light, a space that will stay 65-70 degrees, clean potting containers, a seed-starting soil mix, trays to hold the pots and plant heating pads. You'll also want good air circulation, so get a clip-on fan if needed. Be creative. Any container that has holes in the bottom for drainage -- even an egg carton -- can be used as a pot; a cookie sheet can be your tray. Shop lights come with chains and S hooks for hanging, but you can also prop them up. Initially lights should be just a couple of inches above the pots, but you'll need to move them up as the plants grow.
2. **Plant:** Fill small pots with seed-starting mix and sow seeds just under the soil, which Hicks says is shallower than typically recommended. She's had better results by not putting too much soil over the seeds.
3. **Water:** Put newly planted pots in a tray with a couple of inches of water. When the soil darkens, lift the pots out of the tray and drain well. Empty water from the tray, put pots back and place the tray atop the heating pad and under the lights. While waiting for the plants to germinate, mist regularly to keep soil at the top of the pot moist to the touch. Don't overwater. Once the plants are up, water from the bottom, but don't let pots sit in standing water.
4. **Grow:** Keep the fluorescent light on 12 to 16 hours a day; use a timer for convenience. Watch for plants to emerge. Look to seed packets for instructions on pinching off new growth; some herbs need more than others.
5. **Prepare outdoor beds and pots:** Select a site or put pots in an area that gets at least six hours of sun a day, has easy access to irrigation and has well-drained soil. If you've got sticky clay soil, add quarter-10 gravel and compost so that roots will drain well in winter. If using pots, make sure they are large enough to accommodate the roots of developed herbs. Use standard potting soil.
6. **Move plants outdoors:** In April it will probably be warm enough to begin getting plants used to the outdoor environment. New plants can't withstand frost, hard rain or wind. Initially allow pots to be outside in a protected sunny area for a couple of hours a day, gradually increasing each day for about a week. If it's a cold night, Hicks advises, pull them back in. When the danger of frost is past and your soil doesn't stay in a ball when you make a fist, you're ready to plant.

12 HERBS TO START FROM SEED

1. **Basil:** 'Swiss Sunset,' best red-leaved variety but 'Red Rubin' does well in Illinois heat. 'Nufar' resists wilt. Basil is an *annual* and more sensitive to cold than other herbs, so delay starting seeds until May and move outside in June. To encourage growth, begin pinching back after it has three sets of leaves.
2. **Chives:** *Perennial*. They grow in clumps and provide edible lilac to rosy-pink, cloverlike blooms. Good for indoor growing or in smaller containers.
3. **Dill:** *self-seeding annual*. This versatile plant can be grown for the leaves (dill weed) or the seeds (dill seed) Sew a new set of seeds every two weeks to keep a constant crop of dill weed and give you plenty of seed for pickling and winter interest.
4. **English lavender:** *Shrubby herb*, easy to grow from seed. Trim back when seedlings reach 2 inches high; keep water off leaves.
5. **Sweet marjoram:** *Perennial*. If you want to grow this from seed, start it before the last frost indoors, then move outdoors when temps are expected to stay above 45 degrees.
6. **Greek oregano:** *Perennial*. Sow the seed directly, but do not cover seed with soil; it needs light to germinate. Sow thinly and grow on the dry side.
7. **Italian (flat) parsley** *Biennial*. Flat-leaf type is the standard for cooking and less soapy tasting than curly types. Remember that the second year it will produce seed, so the leaves you want will turn bitter.
8. **Rosemary:** *Shrubby herb*. It's a bit more challenging to start from seed, but you can improve your luck by scratching the shiny seed coat with an emery board before planting. Rosemary is prone to powdery mildew, so keep in a well ventilated area and don't overwater.
9. **Sage:** *Perennial*. Start this seed indoors before the last frost, but it tends to mildew inside, so move outside soon after sprouting. Wait to start this one until early May.
10. **Borage:** *Annual*. This quick growing herb has large seeds and is great to plant with kids. The lovely purple flowers are edible and can be frozen and candied.
11. **Cilantro:** *self-seeding annual*. A must have for Oriental and Tex Mex recipes, cilantro will give your tacos, salsa and burritos authentic south-of-the-border flavor and flair. The seed is often marked Coriander as that is what the fruit of this plant is called.
12. **Pot Marigold** (*Calendula officinalis*): *annual*. I recommend Pot Marigold because of its pom flowers that have bold colors and start to bloom just when many other plants are getting leggy and less attractive. And the flowers can be used to flavor rice and made face creams for vastly different benefits.

Growing Herbs From Cuttings

Remember to keep your tools sterilized. Even the smallest germs will kill young plants. 9 parts water and 1 part bleach is a perfect solution for cleaning tools.

Make sure your shears are sharp; dull will pinch the branch making rooting more difficult.

Take a cutting from just below the leaf node, making a clean cut without ragged edges. You will need between 2 and 4 inches of new growth with plenty of leaves. Trim off the lower third of leaves from stem. Trim off the cut edge and dip just the cut tip in a ground cinnamon to ward off germs. This stops fungus growth. Don't get it on the stem it will retard roots.

Make a soil mix of 1 part sand and 1 part vermiculite and pack it into plastic, clay or paper pots with drainage holes. Do not use standard planting mix. Wet the mixture and pack it down gently.

Insert the stem about 1 inch into the soil mixture so it stands erect. I use a dibble to make a hole (that is a fancy name for a pointed pencil.)

Cover the pot with a plastic bag to hold moisture. Mist them daily early in day until roots form. Remove the plastic cover every couple of days to keep mold and fungus from forming. (This plastic covering is optional, I rarely use it myself.)

Once roots are established remove gently and transplant cuttings to pots containing regular soil blend and move to a sunny location. You know the roots have formed if you tug gently on the cutting and discover it tugs back. Don't do this for at least 2 weeks for most herbs, 3 weeks for rosemary and up to 6 weeks for bay laurel.

Your plants will take 3 to 5 weeks to get about 3 to 4 inches high. Then you can start pinching them to make them bushier.

Container Gardening Tips

As you plan for Spring planting, don't forget a few containers. I live in an apartment, so when I cannot get to my garden down the road, I like to have plants nearby for decoration, scent and cooking supply. Here are a few tips and ideas to get you thinking about Herbs in containers.

Growing your own culinary herbs in containers is quite easy. Some herbs are best started from seed as they do not transplant well, others are quite forgiving and can be grown from seeds, cuttings, or transplanted from nursery stock. Herbs can be planted several to a container or individually. I prefer growing each herb in its own container if I have space, as this allows me to move them easily and create cooking groupings by the grill for easy use. I tend to pick containers which will mimic the eventual shape of the plant – tall pots for tall herbs such as sage, upright rosemary, or dill, short wide pots for flat growers like marjoram, winter savory, thyme, and Corsican mint. Add a few containers of edible flowers -nasturtium, viola, pansy, calendula (pot marigold), or lavender for added beauty of both your garden and your cooking.



1. Chose containers with trays or get trays and fill them with pebbles. Herbs do not like to have wet feet, but they also like to have a bit of water to draw on in the heat of the day. Placing the pot in a tray will keep you from watering twice during the hot days of summer.
2. Herbs can be cross-planted, so let basil and oregano share a pot. Cilantro and dill with their light leaves look good together.
3. If you like to combine herbs in containers, remember to place taller growers in the center and lower growers on the outside edges. Thyme is a great companion in the pot to Basil, Dill and tarragon. Tarragon which can get 3 feet tall in the ground will be a much smaller grower in a pot, so remember to plan accordingly.
4. When planting dill or cilantro, sew seed rather than purchasing plants. In the hot months these will bolt (go to seed) so you can preserve a summer harvest by dropping a few new seed into the pot every two weeks.
5. A soil mix in the pots high in organic matter is a must. I create my own blend rather than buying something that may not last the season. 5 parts top soil; 2 parts cool compost or peat; 1 part coarse (not play) sand. The sand increases the oxygen and the compost provides the organic matter. Later in the season I use a mix of 50% top soil and 50% compost to top off the pots as the soil sinks. This adds more nutrients and replaces what is lost to erosion.
6. Nearly all herbs prefer six hours of full sun or more per day, so take this into consideration when planning your container herb garden. A sunny location is a must.
7. Throughout the growing season pinch back the ends of the branches on your herbs to promote branching and the production of more leaves to harvest.
8. Don't let your herbs flower, unless you want to look at rather than eat them. Herb flavors change when they create flowers, so cut those flower heads off to preserve the best flavors for cooking and tea.
9. Check daily for dryness and water when soil is dry to about 1" depth. Do not over water and provide good drainage.

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Your Herbal Harvest

You can begin harvesting your herbs for daily use when the plant has enough foliage to ensure continued growth. Successive harvests throughout the season encourage bushy plants with stronger leaf growth, so plan to cut back your plants and preserve your harvest frequently.

- Harvest in the morning, after the dew dries but before the temperature climbs, to ensure that you've caught the plant when its essential oils are strongest. Here are some things to remember:
- Herbs are at their best when they're fresh-picked. For daily use, pick just what you need. Wrap herbs in a damp paper towel and put them in a tightly-closed plastic bag in the refrigerator.
- Long-stemmed herbs (thyme, rosemary, oregano, savory, dill, fennel) can be kept on the kitchen counter for a few days. Strip lower leaves for immediate use and put the stems in a narrow-necked vase filled with water, out of the sun.
- Herbs produce their most intense oil concentration and flavor after the flower buds appear but before they open. Harvest at this time for most uses. Blooming plants such as basil and oregano may still be suitable for vinegars, however.



- Harvest annual herbs until frost, making as many successive harvests as possible without damaging the plant. Don't cut too near the ground, for lower foliage is necessary for strong, continuing growth. At the end of the season, harvest the entire plant.
- Harvest perennial herbs until about one month before the frost date. Late pruning encourages tender growth that may be killed by the frost, and plants need the regrowth to see them through the winter.
- Harvest tarragon or lavender flowers in early summer, then cut the plants to half their height to encourage fall flowering.
- Harvest herb seeds (mustard, fennel) as the seed pods darken and dry, but before they burst. Secure a paper bag over the seed head to complete ripening, then cut the stem and hang the bag for further drying.
- Harvest herb roots (bloodroot, chicory, ginseng, goldenseal, horseradish) after the foliage fades.

Harvesting and storing herbs

Herbs are tremendously useful in so many ways. Your home herb garden has been planted, watered, taken care of, and you've watched the plants grow and thrive. Now it's time to learn how to use those wonderful herbs and it requires a little bit of work.

The first step in using the results of your garden is to harvest them. Harvesting the herb does not mean removing the entire plant and timing is a very important element. The herb's essential oils can be dispersed by the wind and the heat, and on extremely wet days, fewer oils are produced by the plants. The best time to harvest your herbs is during midsummer, on a calm and dry morning. Harvest them right before the flowers open in the morning and just after the dew has dried from the leaves. Take only a certain amount of growth and be careful not to take more than a third of the herb's foliage at one time, since the plant will need the remaining foliage to continue to grow well. Also inspect the herb for any damaged leaves or insects before harvesting it.

Using fresh herbs right out of your garden is a delight. Make sure to clean the herbs before using them fresh in recipes. To clean fresh herbs, fill a bowl with cool water and place the herbs in the bowl. For a larger quantity, use the cleaned kitchen sink. Add about two tablespoons of salt to the water. Any insects present on the herbs will be driven away by the salt in the water, without damaging the plant. To dry the herbs, remove them from the water and place in a **salad spinner** for quick drying.

Of course, herbs don't have to be used at the time they are picked. They can be preserved for later use in three ways by: drying, freezing, or preserving them in salt or vinegar.

Drying herbs: remove any foliage near the base and bundle six to twelve stems together, securing the bundle with a string. Hang the bundle upside down in a cool place and away from sunlight. Some herbs lend themselves to drying in individual leaves. To dry individual leaves, place them on a rack or screen. To dry the leaves properly, it's important to remember to turn them often. A few more automated ways of drying leaves, though also less satisfactory, are appliances like dehydrators, ovens or microwave ovens.

Freezing Herbs: Another fairly simple way to preserve herbs for later use is freezing them. Prepare a baking sheet by lining it with wax paper. Cut the herbs into quarter inch pieces and place them on the baking sheet in the freezer. Once the herbs are frozen, remove them from the baking sheet and place them together in a bag. Store the bag in the freezer until needed.

Preserving Herbs: One can also preserve herbs in a medium such as salt, sugar or vinegar. For example, to preserve whole branches of basil, mint, or tarragon, cover the herbs with vinegar and they will be available to use for several months. Making a flavored salt is a great way to use herbs. Alternate layers of fresh herbs and salt on a flat surface or use a mortar and pestle to press the herbs into the salt. When the herbs are completely dry, separate them from the flavored salt and store them in an airtight container. Or transfer the flavor to sugar by layering in a container and allowing the essential oils to flavor the sugar, remove the herbs and enjoy the flavored sugar in coffee, tea or cookies.

Crafting a Compound Butter: Mix 1 to 2 Tbls fresh minced herbs into 1 stick of unsalted butter. You can use the butter fresh or roll into a log and freeze for later. Thaw to room temp to cook with or use as a spread.

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Preserving Herbs

Sugar conserving and salt curing. This is when leaves of herbs are layered and well-covered in sugar or salt so that they retain more color and texture.

- **Sugar conserving:** Mint, scented geranium, lavender and fragrant basil are good candidates for sugar conserving. Pour 1/2 inch of sugar into a clean glass or nonreactive container. Place leaves across the surface. Cover completely with a 1/4- to 1/2-inch layer of sugar. Add another layer of herbs, then another layer of sugar. Repeat until all the leaves are covered (or the container is full). Make sure the top layer of sugar completely covers herbs. Seal the container. Store in the refrigerator or a cool spot in your house.
- **Salt layering:** Done exactly the same way using sea salt or kosher salt instead of sugar. Most herbs will work well, but the savory herbs are the best – basil, oregano, thyme, tarragon, savory, etc.

Herbal Vinegar



Fresh herbs (any herb from basil, chives, savory lemon herbs, tarragon, even lavender)
Distilled white vinegar (5% acidity)

Roughly chop or bruise 1 to 2 large handfuls of fresh herbs in a glass jar with a wide mouth and a plastic lid. Add vinegar to fill the jar. Replace the lid and leave for a few days or weeks (I generally like to wait 2 weeks) to infuse, and then strain out the herbs.

You can use these herb vinegars to cook with anywhere plain vinegar is called for. Or you can clean with them. Pour the vinegar into a plastic spray bottle for cleaning and disinfecting.

Using Herbal Vinegar

1. Make Salad Dressing: Blend $\frac{3}{4}$ cup olive oil with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup herb vinegar, 1 Tbls water and an optional Tablespoon of dried herbs.
2. Clean your coffee maker. Fill the reservoir with a full strength, undiluted thyme vinegar. Run the vinegar through one cycle. Run two cycles of water to rinse.
3. Remove pesticides from fruits and vegetables. Wash them in a mixture of 2 or 3 tablespoons of sage and/or thyme vinegar per quart of water. The antifungal qualities of sage will also help with natural borne fungus and the antiviral qualities of thyme will help against bacteria.
4. Cut grease and absorb odors on wood cutting boards, wipe down with a lemon, thyme or basil vinegar.
5. Clean and freshen the microwave mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vinegar and 1 cup water in a small bowl and heat for 5 minutes. This will remove lingering odors and soften baked on food spills.
6. Mildew removal. Full strength vinegar, especially thyme vinegar will remove mildew from a shower curtain. You can add a couple drops of lemon essential oil for a sweet smell.
7. Floor cleaner. To clean floors and kill germs try this recipe: $\frac{1}{8}$ cup liquid soap, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup thyme vinegar, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup herbal tea (peppermint smells great, lemon cuts grease, thyme and sage will kill germs.)
8. Keep your dishwasher clean and fresh. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup herb vinegar to the rinse cycle.
9. To dissolve mineral build up on clogged shower heads. Soak overnight in diluted Herb vinegar.

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10. Cut grease and make glasses sparkle by adding 3 Tbls. herb vinegar to the sink with the dishwashing detergent.
11. Clean soap scum from a glass shower screen. Mix 2 parts salt with 1 part herb vinegar. Rub onto the screen with a cloth or fine steel wool. Rinse and dry.
12. Stop Mold mix 2 teaspoons and 21 cup herb vinegar. Apply with a cloth, leave for 30 minutes then wipe off.
13. Clean the refrigerator by wiping out the fridge with herb vinegar, then rub over with a sponge dipped in vanilla essence.
14. Remove mold from refrigerator door seals with an old toothpaste dipped in herbal vinegar.
15. Freshen and disinfect your kitchen cloths and sponges by soaking overnight in a solution of boiling water with a good splash of herb vinegar and a few drops of eucalyptus oil. Rinse well in the morning.
16. Place 1 cup water and ¼ cup herbal vinegar in a bowl in the microwave and zap on high for 5 minutes. When it cools a little, use it to wipe the wall of the oven with a damp cloth.
17. Clear Drains. Pour ½ cup of baking soda and chase it with ½ cup vinegar, then watch it fizz as the acid and alkaline react to each other.
18. Polish Copper. Tarnished copper can be cleaned with 16 ounces of white vinegar with 3 Tbls. of table salt dissolved in it. Spray onto copper, let sit briefly then rub clean.

Lemon Vinegar

- 1 1/2 c. lemon basil
- 1 c. lemon verbena
- 1 c. lemon balm
- 1/2 c. lemon thyme sprigs
- Lemon peel from one lemon
- 4 c. white vinegar

Place all ingredients in a large glass container and cover. Steep for 3 to 4 weeks and strain and rebottle. Remember do not use metal containers or metal lids.

Simple Syrup

- 1 c. water
- 1 c. sugar, honey or sugar substitute
- 1 c. herbs of your choice (fresh)

Place all ingredients in a saucepan and warm over medium heat. Stir until the sugar is totally dissolved. Remove from heat and allow to cool to room temperature. Strain out the herbs and enjoy the syrup. Can be frozen up to 6 months. Will keep in the refrigerator up to 3 weeks.

Simple Syrup Uses:

1. Combine 2 Tbls with 8 ounces of sparkling water or seltzer for a refreshing drink
2. Use to craft a cocktail or mocktail.
3. Drizzle over poundcake, scones or sliced fruit as a glaze
4. Pour over ice cream or use as a syrup on pancakes
5. Add to a shake or smoothie as sweetener
6. Use to sweeten tea or coffee
7. Craft a lemonade or iced tea.