

## These top 10 herbs will add flavor to your favorite dishes

**Basil:** Comes in more than 2 dozen varieties ~ A close relative to mint, basil has a floral anise- and clove-like flavor and aroma. There are two main types of basil: Sweet, or Italian, basil and Asian basil. In Western cuisine, basil is most often associated with Mediterranean foods like pesto and tomato sauce. Sweet basil pairs naturally with tomatoes, but it can be used with almost every type of meat or seafood. Asian basil has a more distinct anise flavor and is often used in soups, stews, stir fries and curry pastes. Basil: Fresh basil can be used whole, torn, or chopped in salads, egg dishes, & pastas.

Flavor: almost peppery

Great with: Tomatoes, vegetables, poultry, grilled pizzas, salads

Notes: It's best used as whole leaves or torn. Smaller leaves at top of bunch are the sweetest.

Kinds: Lemon, cinnamon, **Genovese( sign of love)** sweet,

**Parsley:** One of the most common and versatile herbs used in Western cooking, parsley has a light peppery, grassy flavor that complements other seasonings. It's most often used in sauces, salads and sprinkled over dishes at the end of cooking for a flash of green and a fresh taste. Flat-leaf or Italian parsley has the best texture and flavor for cooking. Curly parsley is best used only as a garnish. Fresh parsley makes a great garnish for cooked meats, chicken, and fish and is tasty in bean, pasta, and rice dishes. You'll find it dried in Italian seasoning and other packaged herb mixes. Flavor: Peppery and fresh; curly parsley is milder than flat-leaf Italian

Great with: Salads, vegetables (especially potatoes), pasta

Notes: Either variety is a breath freshener.

**Cilantro:** Cilantro, also called coriander or Chinese parsley, has a flavor that some people find "soapy," but it's still one of the world's most popular spices. Many people are addicted to its bright refreshing flavor, and it's a staple of Latin and Asian cooking. The sweet stems and leaves are usually eaten raw, added after a dish has been cooked.

The roots are used to make Thai curry pastes. This lively tasting herb is popular in Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Use it to make salsas, toss it into salads, or sprinkle it over baked chicken or fish. Fresh is preferable to dried. Flavor: A lively flavor; soapy, some say; looks similar to flat-leaf parsley

Great with: Asian, Mexican and Indian dishes; mix in salsas and chutneys

Notes: Leaves become bitter after plant flowers. Dried seeds are the spice coriander.

**Mint:** Although more commonly associated with sweet treats, mint lends its cooling, peppery bite to plenty of savory dishes, particularly from the Middle East and North Africa. Fresh mint is perfect for summer-fresh salads, to liven up a sauce and or to brew fragrant teas. The cooling flavor is also used to temper spicy curries. Most people think of mint as an herb used in desserts or drinks, but it is also terrific in soups and salads. Fresh is far preferable to dried. Kinds of mint: chocolate, peppermint, apple mint...

Flavor: Cool; brightens up both savory and sweet dishes

Great with: Beverages, jellies, sauces, marinades for meat and vegetables; often tossed with buttered peas

Notes: The most popular variety is spearmint. To dry, hang in a dark place with low humidity.

**Rosemary:** A tough, woody herb with a pungent flavor, rosemary's spiky needlelike leaves can be used fresh or dried for long cooking in soups, meats, stews or sauces. Because the flavor is strong, it's best to add rosemary sparingly at first and more if needed. Fresh rosemary can be stored for about a week in the fridge either in a plastic bag or stems down in a glass of water with a plastic bag around the top. There's nothing quite like the lemon-pine flavor of this wonderful herb, which is often used to flavor meats, fish, soups, stews, vegetables, pizzas, focaccia, sauces, and dressings. It's available both fresh and dried.

In Latin, rosemary means "dew of the sea"—appropriate since it is indigenous to the Mediterranean. Rosemary is one of the most aromatic and pungent of all the herbs. Its needlelike leaves have pronounced lemon-pine flavor that pairs well with roasted lamb, garlic, and olive oil.

Flavor: Pungent aroma and pine flavor Great with: Mediterranean dishes, lamb, poultry, fish, breads; add sprigs or finely chopped leaves to long-cooking stews

Notes: When grilling, sturdier stems make good skewers; branches can be a basting brush.

**Thyme :** One of the most popular herbs in American and European cooking, thyme can be paired with nearly any kind of meat, poultry, fish, or vegetable. To use fresh thyme, peel off as many of the leaves as you can from the woody stem by running your fingers along the stem. Particularly with younger thyme, some of the main stem or little offshoot stems will be pliable and come off with the leaves, which is fine. Thyme keeps for at least a week in the fridge, wrapped in a damp paper towel and stored in a plastic bag.

Flavor: Minty and citrusy

Great with: Mediterranean dishes, stews, eggs, seafood, poultry; toss sprigs into boiling water to flavor steamed rice

Notes: Strip leaves from stems by pulling through fork tines.

Popular in French-inspired dishes, thyme has an assertive flavor that goes well with many foods, including tomato dishes and vegetable soups. It's also an excellent seasoning for meats, poultry, and fish. It's available both fresh and dried.

**Sage:** Most people use dried sage once a year for their Thanksgiving stuffing, but there are many other delicious uses for this herb, particularly in dishes with pork, beans, potatoes, cheese, or in the classic sage and brown butter sauce. Sage is native to the northern Mediterranean coast, where it's used frequently in cooking. Sage's long, oval, narrow leaves have a distinctively fuzzy texture and musty flavor redolent of eucalyptus, cedar, lemon, and mint. The flavor can be somewhat overwhelming — particularly with dried sage — so start off with a small amount and build on that. Fresh sage can add nuance and complexity to a dishes. **This Mediterranean herb has a strong earthy flavor**

that is perfect for chicken, pork, ham, bean, and vegetable dishes. It's available both fresh and dried. Flavor: Very aromatic and woody  
Great with: Fresh sausage, holiday stuffing for turkey, rich meats like pork, goose and duck, veal  
Notes: Deep-fried sage is a lovely garnish.

**Chives:** Chives add a flavor similar to onion without the bite. Plus, their slender tube-like appearance looks great as a garnish either snipped and sprinkled or laid elegantly across a plate. Add these delicate herbs at the very end to maximize their color and flavor. Purple chive blossoms are more pungent than the stems and can be a beautiful addition to a salad. A relative of onions and leeks, chives have a mild onion-like flavor. Snip them with scissors or gently chop with a sharp knife, and then try them in chicken salad, scrambled eggs, or salad dressings.  
Flavor: Subtle onion with grasslike leaves  
Great with: Egg dishes, soups, sauces, baked potatoes, fish  
Notes: Snip with scissors for best results. Chive flowers make a pretty garnish.

**Dill:** A symbol of vitality ~ The feathery leaves, or fronds, of the dill plant add a pleasant anise-like flavor to seafood, soups, salads and sauces. Its subtle taste makes an excellent compliment to foods with delicate flavors like fish and shellfish, and it is commonly used in cuisine across Europe and the Middle East. Fresh dill should have a strong scent and keeps in the refrigerator for about 3 days. Available both fresh and dried, dill is a great addition to salads and sauces, as well as to fish, chicken, meat, and vegetable dishes. **It is actually a member of the carrot family**  
Flavor: Fresh and grassy; feathery leaves used in pickle brine  
Great with: Tuna salad, omelets, vegetables, seafood dishes, yogurt dressing for cucumbers, herb vinegars, goat cheese, cream cheese  
Notes: Use dill fresh or add to hot food just before serving.

**Oregano:** Oregano, a pungent herb primarily found in Mediterranean and Mexican cuisines, is one of the few herbs that dries well, so it is easier to find dried oregano than fresh. Dried oregano can be substituted for fresh, but use half as much dried oregano as you would fresh since the flavor is more concentrated. Oregano can also be used as a substitute for its close cousin, marjoram. **A relative of mint,** oregano is an aromatic herb commonly used in tomato-based soups and sauces, and for seasoning poultry, lamb, shrimp, or vegetable dishes. Oregano grows wild in the mountains of Italy and Greece; its Greek name means "joy of the mountain." Oregano and marjoram are so similar in looks and flavor that they are often confused.  
Flavor: Earthy; balances acidic tomatoes — hence common on pizza  
Great with: Lamb, beef, eggs, beans, eggplant, sprinkled on salads, pizza, tomato sauces, vinaigrette  
Notes: **It's closely related to marjoram** (but more pungent), so they aren't classified separately. Marjoram is sweeter

**Tarragon:** Distinguished by its anise-like flavor, tarragon is a great addition to fish and vegetable dishes, sauces, and salad dressings. It's available both fresh and dried.

Though this herb is native to Siberia and western Asia, tarragon is primarily used in France. It's often added to white wine vinegar, lending sweet, delicate licorice-like perfume and flavor. It pairs well with fish, omelets, and chicken cooked with mustard, and it's a crucial component of béarnaise sauce. Fresh tarragon isn't always easy to find, but when you get it, you'll love the bittersweet, peppery taste it imparts. Heat diminishes its flavor, so add tarragon toward the end of cooking, or use it as a garnish. A little goes a long way. **It is a member of the daisy family.**

Flavor: Reminiscent of licorice

Great with: Poultry, fish, shellfish, vegetables, vinegar and eggs; indispensable in the French béarnaise sauce

Notes: Two types; French is preferred over the more bitter Russian.

### **Not all herbs behave the same way during cooking:**

Fragile herbs should be added at the end of cooking because their oils dissipate when heated (parsley, tarragon).

Robust herbs benefit from lengthy cooking (thyme, rosemary). Their flavors infuse a dish more slowly. In most cases, heat kills the flavor of fresh herbs, so they're best when added to a dish at the end.

**Fragile Herbs:** (Basil, mint, chervil, parsley, tarragon) These bruise easily and are best used coarsely chopped. They are often eaten raw or only lightly cooked

**Robust Herbs:** (Savory, rosemary, bay leaf, thyme, sage, oregano, marjoram) They are harsher when raw, are resistant to winter cold, summer sun, and cooking heat, are strong in aroma and hearty in flavor

Herbs can be coarsely cut, chopped, chiffonade, minced, ground to a paste ~how they are prepared affects the flavor. Mortar and pestle intensifies the flavor as more of the oils are released.

### **Drying Herbs**

If the herbs come from your own garden and you know that they haven't been exposed to pesticides or other chemicals, you only need to inspect them for insects and dirt. If they aren't dirty, there is no need to wash them. It is much easier to handle dry herbs than wet ones. If the herbs are store-bought or contain dirt, you will need to wash them and pat them dry with paper towels before drying. Make sure you dry them well, because wet herbs can mold.

Tie a small bunch of herbs (about 4 to 6 sprigs) together with a string or rubber band and hang them indoors, upside down in a dry, warm spot, but not in direct sunlight. You

can also dry them by lying them on a wire rack (like the ones you use to cool baked goods). Make sure there is good air circulation, so the herbs don't get moldy. They will take a few days to up to a week to dry. The herbs are ready to be used when the leaves crumble easily when you crush them between your fingers.

Drying time will depend on humidity, temperature, and the item you are drying. Most herbs will be ready in 10-14 days; they are done if a leaf rubbed between your fingers crumbles easily.

Store dried herbs in sealed jars or plastic bags in cool, dark place. If moisture appears in the jar or bag, it is a sign that the herb is not completely dry. Avoid crushing the leaves until you are ready to use them; crushed herbs lose their flavor more quickly.

### **Oven Drying**

Place the herbs on a cookie sheet and put them in the oven on the lowest setting until the herbs are dried. This can take anywhere between 15 minutes to a few hours. Check them and turn them over every now and then to make sure they don't become too dry or burn.

### **Drying herbs in a microwave**

Place a single layer of herbs on a paper towel and microwave them. Check them every 30 seconds to see if they are done. It usually takes about 2 minutes. This method does not work well for all herbs. Some herbs will become too dry and lose their flavor. It works best for basil, mint, oregano, rosemary, tarragon and thyme. The quality however, will be less good than with the other methods.

**Dehydrators** are good for drying herbs. Drying time will vary depending on humidity so don't expect quick results in wet weather or if you have your dehydrator in a damp basement. Follow instructions for your dehydrator regarding temperature settings.

### **Freezing Herbs**

Wash the herbs and pat them dry, spread them in a single layer on a pan, and put them in the freezer. Chop herbs into preferred sizes before freezing. Chop chives and lemongrass before you freeze them. These herbs are thin and will freeze within minutes. Frozen herbs are too limp to use as decoration but it is an excellent way to preserve the flavor of fresh herbs.

**Resealable freezer bags are handy for freezing herbs.** Put them into labeled, sealed containers and keep them in the freezer. Push all the air out of plastic containers before sealing them. In most cases, you don't need to thaw these herbs before you use them.

**Another tasty way to freeze herbs is to make a paste** by mixing 1/3 cup of oil with 2 cups of herbs in a blender until smooth. The paste freezes beautifully in sealed jars or in ice cube trays that are thoroughly wrapped to make them airtight. The paste will also keep for about a week in the refrigerator. In winter, retrieve a frozen paste to give a

fresh taste to your dishes. Herbs that are good candidates for grinding into pastes include basil, chervil, cilantro, coriander, dill, fennel, marjoram, mint, parsley, rosemary, sage, savory, and tarragon.

**Herbs can also be frozen to make decorative ice cubes for party drinks.** Disk the bottom of a mold with water and freeze. Arrange the herbs you plan to freeze, then continue adding water until the mold is filled.

**Ice cube trays:** cover chopped or minced herbs **in** water or olive oil

### **Storing**

After drying, you can store the herbs in an airtight glass container You can crumble them up or store the herbs whole. Whole dried herbs can be crumbled up when you need them and will keep their flavor longer. If you see any sign of moisture in the container, you should remove the herbs and dry them a bit longer (a few minutes in the oven should be enough). Make sure the herbs aren't moldy yet.