

APRIL: FRESH HERBS AND SPICES

Fresh herbs and spices can take a dish from good to great! Whether using a pinch of a **fresh herb**, a bit of a dry **spice**, or a whole bunch of **fresh herbs**, dishes are infused with unparalleled aromas, flavors, colors, textures, and even nutrition thanks to these yummy additions! Using some of the info below, try using **fresh herbs** and/or **spices** in your meal plans!

FRESH HERBS!

By definition,

“an herb is the fragrant leaf of any of various annual or perennial plants that grow in temperate zones and do not have woody stems.”¹

How often do you use fresh herbs in your meals? Do you grow them? Some of the most commonly available fresh herbs are: basil, bay leaf, cilantro, chervil, coriander, marjoram, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, savory, tarragon and thyme. Throw in some fresh herbs at the end of the cooking process, or into raw dishes such as salads, to enjoy the bright flavor herbs!



Fresh Thyme, Rosemary and Basil



Parsley, Cilantro, and Mint

FLAVORFUL SPICES!

By definition,

“a spice is a pungent or aromatic seasoning obtained from the bark, buds, fruit, roots, seeds or stem of various plants and trees.”¹

How many of the most popular spices do you have in your kitchen? Check out allspice, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg, paprika, pepper, and turmeric, as well as spice blends such as curry powder, chili powder, garam masala, cajun seasoning, and pumpkin pie spice. Did you know that salt, often listed as a spice, actually is a mineral, not a spice?! But, go ahead and use it (sparingly!) to pull out the flavors of your fresh cooked foods!



¹ <http://startcooking.com/herbs-and-spices>

Fresh Herbs and Spices Tips

- Organize your **dried spices** in alphabetical order – makes it a cinch to grab what you need to add yummy flavor to your dishes!
- If you are using **fresh herbs** instead of dried, the ratio is 3 to 1. So, if the recipe calls for 1 tsp of dried oregano, you would use 3 tsp of fresh oregano. (Reverse if using dry instead of fresh!)
- **Dried spices** should be stored in a cool, dark, dry environment, away from direct sunlight, in air tight containers, away from the heat of an oven, moisture of a dishwasher (inside a cupboard, not on top of the counter!).
- **Fresh herbs** not only are great in food, throw some in your ice water to add sugar-free flavor and aromas! Take a few mint leaves, mash them together, then drop them in, stir and enjoy! Try basil too, with watermelon, lemon, or pineapple pieces.
- Don't go by the date purchased or date on the bottle to decide if a **dried spice** is too old – it's much better to just smell dried spices before using them. If they have lost their scent, they should get tossed into the trash.
- Try freezing **fresh herbs** (much better than throwing them away!) - like basil, chives, dill, lemongrass, mint, oregano, sage, and thyme. Simply wash and dry them, chop, and put them in sealed plastic bags, then into the freezer! When you need them, throw a pinch or 2 in your dishes – easy!

Fresh Herbs – Grow Some!

Try growing herbs indoors! Find a bright space, a large sunny window, with temps between 55 and 75 degrees and good air circulation (be careful if window is too cold in winter!). Most herbs grow best with at least 5-6 hours of bright light; mint, parsley and chives do fine with 4-5. Plant herb in 6-inch pot using fast-draining potting mix, one that includes aerating ingredients such as perlite. Water when soil feels dry to touch. Fertilize monthly.

Fresh Herbs and Spices Recipes!

RED POTATOES AND THYME

Ingredients

- 1 quart water
- 2 pounds small red skin potatoes, quartered
- 1 T extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 T butter
- Salt and Pepper
- 2 T, 5 or 6 sprigs, **fresh thyme**, leaves stripped and chopped

In a deep, medium skillet, bring water to a boil. Add potatoes, simmer 12 mins, until fork tender. Drain in colander. Empty water from pan, then heat pan over medium high, add olive oil and butter, when butter melts, add potatoes. Season with salt, pepper, and chopped thyme – coating potatoes, turn occasionally 7-8 mins. Adapted from: <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/rachael-ray/red-potatoes-and-thyme-recipe.html>

FRESH BASIL PESTO

Ingredients

- 2 cups **fresh basil** leaves, packed
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Romano or Parmesan-Reggiano cheese (about 2 ounces)
- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/3 cup pine nuts (can substitute chopped walnuts)
- 3 garlic cloves, minced (about 3 teaspoons)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Place basil leaves and pine nuts in bowl of food processor or blender, and pulse a several times. Add garlic and cheese, pulse several times more. Scrape down sides of the bowl with a spatula. While the food processor is running, slowly add olive oil in a steady stream. Scrape sides of bowl, stir in salt and pepper to taste. Toss with whole-wheat pasta for a quick sauce, dollop over baked potatoes, or spread onto crackers or toasted slices of whole grain bread!

Adapted from:

http://www.simplyrecipes.com/recipes/fresh_basil_pesto/