



2012 Herb Primer



Herbs Demystified

Most herbs grow well in soil with good drainage (silt loam or sandy loam preferable) and a pH of 5.8 - 6.2. Many herbs play important ecological functions on the farm, attracting beneficial insects and pollinators, deterring and confusing pests with their strong volatile oils, and as dynamic accumulators - drawing up essential nutrients such as calcium, magnesium and iron and making available to other plants.

The classic definition of an herb, is any plant used for flavoring, food, fragrance, dyes, or medicine that is without a woody stem and that dies to the ground after flowering. This seemingly neat and tidy definition does not take into account some plants, quite commonly known and used as herbs, yet have woody stems and are perennial, such as rosemary, sage, and lavender as well as some trees such as cinnamon. On our farm, we integrate over 30 species of herbs, annual and perennial, tree or shrub, into your CSA shares over the season. That's a lot of plants to consider for your palette! We hope that through this herb primer we can demystify some of the 'unidentified' fragrant, leafy green things that show up in your shares, highlight some of the amazing attributes of herbs, and encourage you to experiment with herbs in your cuisine, to decorate and scent your precincts, and cure what ails you. It is our hope that you will be inspired by the many creative ways with herbs and their role on the landscape while discovering your own connections and experiments along the way. - ES

***Basil - Lemon, Red, Sweet** - insectory, aromatic pest confuser. Highly fragrant herb ranging from anise, cinnamon, clove and lemon to floral scents depending on variety. An essential, easy to grow herb for any gardener. Great companion to solanaceae, shade tolerant.

Bergamot - Young leaves used in place of oregano for pasta dishes. Infamous tea substitute of Boston patriots during the tea boycott. Also great for hedges, borders. Pollinator attractant, repels biting insects. "Tea legend holds that, after the son of a Chinese mandarin was saved from drowning by an English soldier, Charles Grey, Prime Minister and Earl of the British Empire, was sent the gift of bergamot-scented tea, giving birth the variety known forever as "Earl Grey"

Calendula - re-seeding annual, insectory, pollinator; medicinal, high vitamin E, makes excellent salve. Flowers edible, great garnish

for desserts. Often used in rice dishes, referred to as 'poor man's saffron'.

***Chamomile** - self-seeding annual, pollinator attractor, dynamic accumulator, living mulch. Calming herb with leaves and flowers used often in tea.

***Chervil** - Sweet aromatic, fern-like herb defies the boundaries of a salad. Great anise-like flavor used in teas or pair with sausage. Pollinator attractant, repels biting insects.

***Chives & Garlic Chives** - aromatic pest confuser, insectory, good companion plant to the carrot family. Easy to grow and use wherever you want to incorporate an onion/garlic flavor. Both stems and flowers edible.

Cilantro - an old-world, unique and pungent herb, invokes in people a response of either delight or disdain. Use in salsas, pesto. Does not retain its flavor when dehydrated, so enjoy fresh! Aromatic pest controller.

Dill - Feathery green leaves, pickling spice and spruces up even the most mundane salad. Pairs well with mustards, or add with breads. Pollinator attractant, repels biting insects, great companion to brassicas, solanacea.

Fennel - Insectory, medicinal. Florence fennel grows a bulbous base, with bronze fennel the leaves are preferred. Use pollen and seeds of both for an intense/savory seasoning to meats and vegetables. **Garlic** - A highly esteemed herb, vegetable, and medicine in many cultures, garlic's lore and usage are fascinating. Garlic's protective powers were believed to ward off witches and vampires, and aid the bullfighter and jockey in their craft. There are also over 125 medical articles in the National library of Medicine relaying garlic's studied and believed therapeutic properties in fighting infections, cancer prevention, immune system stimulation, and reducing blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides. The 100 sulfur containing compounds that instill its medicinal properties also contribute to garlic breath (freshen breath with a sprig of parsley as a garlic chaser). Whether you appreciate garlic for its flavor, its health aspects or its folklore, garlic is the quintessential kitchen herb.

* denotes herbs easy to cultivate in containers

Creative Ways with Herbs

Throughout history people have found innumerable ways to benefit from herbs and spices. In various forms, herbs have been used in all stages of the menu; in trade; as medicines, salves, balms, ointments and tonics; and in cosmetics. They've been used to induce sleep, to cast enchanted spells, and as symbols of victory and expressions of sentiment. This season, enjoy a slough of creativity with our fresh organic herbs:

Pickling spices - as pickling season approaches come August, take the time to stock your larder with spices such as - Dill, Coriander, and garlic

Herb Pasta - In lieu of pesto, here's another easy delicious sauce: Mince 1/2 C of fresh herbs such as chives, basil, parsley, thyme, savory, marjoram with 1/2 C softened butter. Saute with garlic, olive oil and melt, pour over pasta and toss.

Herbs for Marinades & Meats: Beef - Rosemary, Savory, Thyme, Lovage; Lamb - Basil, Mint, Parsley, Thyme; Pork - Bronze Fennel, Parsley, Rosemary, Thyme; Poultry & Fish - Basil, Parsley, Tarragon, Rosemary, Marjoram

Herbed Teas - in general a good ratio of herbs to water is 1/2 C fresh herb to 2 C water. For a touch of sweetness add honey or sugar. Enjoy hot or cold. Herbs that make great teas include: Mints, Chamomile, Feverfew, Anise Hyssop, and Bergamot.

Herbed salts - enjoy on greens, fresh raw vegetables, and many cooked dishes. Blend the following herbs with your iodized table salt: Marjoram, thyme, lemon balm.

Soup Stocks - create an herbal soup base in anticipation of fall root crops. Combine 3 - 4 C fresh herbs and cover with 6 - 8 C water, bring to a boil and simmer for 2-3 hours. Strain herbs, store in container in refrigerator for 24 hrs to let stock cool, then place in freezer. Some of our favorite soup stock herbs include lovage, parsley, thyme, marjoram and savory. Combine together or let stand alone.



Horseradish Root - Excellent source of vitamin C. Dynamic accumulator. Peel, grate root. Long shelf life in refrigerator. A staple to any sandwich save PB & J.

***Lavender** - insectory, medicinal, muscle relaxing herb. Good drying herb, add leaves and flowers to bathwater for a relaxing soak. Flowers used in cooking - mostly desserts.

Lovage - dynamic accumulator, medicinal - detoxifying perennial herb. Aromatic leaves/ stems command attention. Use leaves in salads, soups.

***Marjoram** - Popular herb of the Medieval garden, as well as an easy transplant for the potted indoor kitchen garden. Great in Italian sauces, stir fry, as well as poultry dishes. Pollinator attractant, repels biting insects.

***Mints** - We grow a variety of mints including apple, peppermint, bergamot, and anise hyssop. While many mints grow wild throughout the world, cultivated mints tend to have the best volatile oil and taste content. In fact, mint oils also bring out the oil compounds in other plants and play an important role as pollinators, pest managers on the landscape. Mints are also valued medicinally as well. You may recognize mint as a household item in teas and toothpaste or the essential sprig in your summer cocktails and mohitos. A hardy perennial, peppermint can take over in your garden. This is true of all the culinary mints) Don't forget to pamper with peppermint and add to your evening bath, or add the oil to your shampoo, lotions, and hair rinses.

Nasturtium - Bright, peppery flavored blooms excellent addition to salads, dips, or avocado mix. Pickle seeds for caper-like taste. Insectory, pollinator attractants.

***Oregano** - aromatic pest confuser. A staple in any mediterranean or Italian dish.

***Parsley** - Insectory, cold tolerant biennial, overwinters in a pot well. Excellent in salads, soups, as a garnish, or an after dinner breath freshener.

***Rosemary**: The 'dew of the sea' is credited the herb of remembrance, linked with increased mental capacity, happy thoughts, fidelity, and love. The versatile rosemary is often used externally, as an essential oil as well as a culinary herb.

Sage - Hardy, versatile perennial, most notable for its ability to transform any poultry dish. The aromatic herb also works well in clearing the air of pungent odors. Pollinator attractant, repels biting insects.

***Savory** - (summer annual & winter perennial), slightly spicy culinary favorite. Vaguely reminiscent of thyme, soothes bee stings attracts tachnid flies - beneficial insect.

Sorrel - dynamic accumulator. Lemon taste adds zest to early spring salads or flavor to beverages. Save larger leaves for use in soups, or blanch quickly and freeze for later use. Pairs well with eggs, cheese, poultry.

***Tarragon** - Perennial herb appreciated in cuisine from castle halls to country kitchens, used in eggs, cheese, vinegars and sauces.

***Thyme**: Versatile culinary use, as well as medicinal - aids digestion, and used as a tincture, extract, or infusion, commonly used in throat and bronchial issues. Bath additive: Make a strong infusion of fresh leaves and add to bath water. Great use as groundcover, insectory plant.

Other herbs grown on our farm for use as medicinals, insectory, pollinator attractants, aromatic pest confusers & dynamic accumulator plants include: feverfew, valerian, borage, motherwort, nettle, echinacea, pleurisy root, sweet woodruff, st. john's wort, borage, elacampagne.

Herb Drying Made Easy

Virtually any flower or herb (with the exception of cilantro) can be preserved by one method or another, however, some species render themselves better to preservation than others. One such way to enjoy the colors and spices of the season is through drying. The following are some tips for experimenting with flower and herb drying:

Pick flowers and herbs at the peak of perfection (generally the same time you would pick for fresh use, which is late morning, after the dew has dried but before they are subjected to the heat of the day). Bunch flowers and herbs with rubber bands and attach to string and hang upside down from a clothes hanger in a warm, dark place with good air circulation. Incorporate into bouquets, spice racks, in the bath, or under your pillow to beat the winter blues.

Creative Ways with Herbs Cont.

Build Up a Cabinet Full of Flavored Vinegars

One of the most pleasurable things you can do with herbs and spices is to create flavored vinegars. You can use almost every herb and spice, alone or in combination. Experiment with small quantities of various mixes to find flavors you enjoy. The flavoring procedure is simple. Just add 4 ounces (1/2 - 2/3 cup finely chopped) fresh herb or spice to each quart of cold vinegar. Leave for 5 - 6 weeks to develop flavor. Then strain vinegar into clean bottles or leave fresh herb twigs in for show. Cap tightly and store.

As the base use any or several store bought vinegars, white, wine, cider, or malt. If you want flavored vinegar in a hurry, bring the vinegar and spices to

boil and simmer for about 20 minutes. Pour into bottles and cap. It's ready to use without waiting for it to mellow. I would recommend getting started with the following herbs:

Dill, Scallions, Fennel, Chervil, Parsley, Chives - for salad dressing

For meat flavorings and stir-fry vegetables: Savory, Marjoram, Tarragon, Sage

For pasta sauces: Oregano, Thyme, Rosemary, Fennel, Basil, Bergamot

Salad Dressing - Add a bit of zest to greens and pastas. Many herbs can be blended and mixed with vinegar, oil, lemon juice and a dash of salt. Ratios of vinegar to oil to herb in general is 1/4 C: 1/2C: 2-4 TBSP. Herbs to experiment with include chervil, parsley, chives, basil, tarragon dill, mint, garlic, savory and marjoram.

Infusions: A little stronger than a tea. Dried plant material, finely chopped; 4 Cup Water: 1 C plant material. Boil water; cover plant material with hot water; let steep for at least 4 hours.

Oils: Usually fresh plant material. 1 C oil: 1 C plant material. Cover plant material with oil; let sit in a cool dark place for 6 weeks. Recommended oils include olive oil or grapeseed oil.

Herb infused Honey: 1 cup honey 1/4 C fresh plant material. Herbs to consider include - clovers, violet flowers, borage flowers, bergamot, & hyssop.