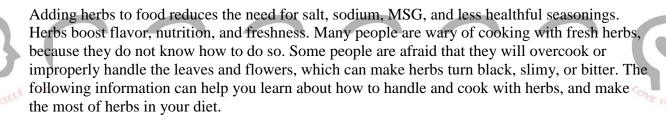
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# Herbs: A Guide for Cooking With Herbs



#### Basil

Famous in pesto, basil has a spicy aroma and a flavor that tastes of pepper, clove, mint, and licorice. Many varieties exist, but basil is usually a pointed, oval-shaped leaf. For best flavor, use very little basil in the cooking process, but add it to a finished dish. Tear the leaves, rather than chopping with a knife to prevent blackening. Basil combines well with garlic, olive oil, lemon, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, potatoes, beans, and rice.

#### **Mint**

Mint is a very hardy and highly fragrant crop. It is best used fresh, but may be dried and added to soups, stews, and stuffing. The leaves of the mint plant have a coarse texture and are ragged on the edges. They grow on stalks or in stemlike clusters. Mint enhances the taste of carrots, potatoes, eggplant, beans, grilled fish, and lamb. It is also compatible with ginger, cumin, cardamom, and cloves. It is famous for enhancing iced teas.

# **Thyme**

Essential in Western and Middle Eastern cooking, thyme has a close tie to zahtar, a similar Middle Eastern spice. Thyme has a very earthy scent, with a taste of clove, camphor, and mint. Dried thyme does not lose its powerful scent or flavor. Thyme is often found dried and tied with a string. Fresh thyme has woody stems and small leaves. Best known in long, slow-cooking recipes, thyme combines well with garlic, onion, red wine, basil, bay, lavender, marjoram, parsley, and savory. Use it when cooking tomato- and wine-based sauces, vegetable soups, and marinades for pork and poultry. It also works well with mushrooms, leeks, eggplant, corn, tomatoes, and dried beans.

## Marjoram

Sweet and spicy, marjoram tastes and smells like camphor. Marjoram has dark green, smooth oval leaves. It is used in a variety of dishes, but because its flavor is easily lost with the addition of heat, add it to foods at the last minute, after they have finished the cooking. Add to salads and soft cheeses, and use to flavor artichokes, broccoli, zucchini, mushrooms, onions, eggs, and poultry.

## Oregano

More robust than marjoram, oregano has an intense pepperiness and more distinct flavor. It comes in a variety of leaf shapes and sizes, and is famous on the tables of pizza restaurants around the world. Oregano is preferred in its dried form, and is best used in pizza and tomato sauces, baked fish, lamb, stews, beans, marinades, and flavored oils and vinegars.

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## Parsley

Found in curly and flat-leaf varieties, parsley is fresh and spicy with a hint of pepper. The stems are more flavorful than the leaves of the parsley herb and are used in cooking. Most famous as a garnish, parsley enhances stuffing, omelets, salads, tabbouleh, and fish. Parsley is good for digestion.

#### Cilantro

Perhaps the most ubiquitous herb in the world, cilantro is earthy with a parsley, mint, and lemon characteristic. Cilantro pairs well with almost any savory food, doing well when combined with garlic, basil, mint, parsley, lemon, lime, chilies, and coconut. Cilantro is also wonderful in chutney, relishes, and salsas. This herb also does well when paired with fish, seafood, beans, chickpeas, plantains, rice, root vegetables, and squash. It is best added at the end of cooking to preserve its fresh flavor.

## Rosemary

Rosemary both smells and tastes of lavender, camphor, and nutmeg. It combines well with thyme, bay leaves, garlic, and wine. Rosemary grows on stems with lovely purple flowers and is best when used fresh. Use rosemary when cooking pork, lamb, and poultry, and add to marinades, eggplant, beans, cabbage, zucchini, potatoes, and tomatoes.

#### Reference

Norman J. The Classic Herb Cookbook. New York, NY: Dorling Kindersley; 1997.

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