

Nutrition for Fitness and Sports Lifestyles

Herbs and Spices

Herbs and spices add variety and interest to all foods, with none of the potential harmful effects that accompany fat, refined sugar and salt. Don't be afraid to experiment with different herb and spice combinations, using this basic rule to guide you: use no more than 3 herbs (when experimenting) in one dish, and let one predominate.

Fresh herbs should be stored in the refrigerator with the stem ends in the water, leaves upright, in a plastic bag which is secured at the top. Herbs can also be stored in the freezer. To freeze fresh herbs, snip the leaves from their stems, and rinse and drain the leaves. Pat dry, and place the leaves in a freezer bag. Use them straight from the freezer. Fresh herbs can also be dried. To dry fresh herbs, hang them upside down for several days or heat them in an oven at 200 degrees F. until completely dried. Store them in bottles, similar to the dried herbs that you buy in the store. Always date and label the bottles. Whether home dried, or store bought, herbs can be stored for up to 2 years in the freezer.

Don't discard your "old" herbs and spices - they can be used for house and garden plant food!

Herbs are the aromatic leaves of plants grown in temperate regions. Some herbs (such as cilantro, oregano, rosemary, tarragon and thyme) have a dominant flavor and can be used by themselves or in a combination with milder ones. Milder herbs (such as basil, dill weed, chervil, chives, marjoram and mint) can be blended into wonderful flavor combinations or used on their own for a delicate flavor.

Use small amounts of herbs, then taste before adding more, as too much of any herb can overwhelm the food and become bitter. Start by adding 1 teaspoon of fresh herbs or ¼ teaspoon of dried herbs for every 4 servings.

For dried herbs, measure then crush the herbs in the palms of your hand to help release more flavor before adding to foods.

Fresh homegrown herbs have more flavor than fresh store-bought herbs. To use fresh herbs instead of dried, use three to four times more fresh herbs than dried. Chop fresh herbs with a knife or snip with kitchen scissors.

Basic Herb Mixes:

Southwestern Blend - ½ teaspoon ground chilies, ¼ teaspoon ground cumin, 1/8 teaspoon each black pepper and garlic powder.

Mediterranean Blend - ¼ teaspoon each basil, oregano, garlic powder, and black pepper

Garden Herb Blend - ¼ teaspoon each basil, marjoram, dill weed, and black pepper

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Herb and use:

Basil (leaves, ground)-eggs, meats, pesto, salads, soups, stews, tomato dishes

Bay leaves (leaves, ground)-meats, pickling, sauces, soups, stews, vegetables

Chervil (leaves)-eggs, fish, salads, sauces, soups, stuffings

Chives (leaves)-appetizers, cream soups, eggs, garnish, salads

Cilantro (leaves; also called Chinese parsley)-Chinese, Italian and Mexican dishes, garnish, pasta salads, pesto

Dill weed (whole, dried)-breads, cheese, fish, salads, sauces, vegetables

Marjoram (leaves, ground)-cottage cheese, fish, lamb, poultry, sausages, soups, stews, stuffings, vegetables