

Misty's View of Herbs



Basil

Oregano

Parsley

What does it take to make a dish taste like spring? Putting a vase of fresh tulips on the dinner table may psyche the mind but it won't fool the palate. For that you need to **bring up the intensity of your recipes with fresh, emerald-green herbs.**

If your idea of herbs is associated with a nifty set of little glass bottles full of pale bits of dry foliage, then you are in for an adven-

ture. Clear your counter; put your apothecary set away. Make room in your fridge for loads of green.

But what is the difference between fresh herbs and dried ones, apart from the higher price? Dried herbs need to spend longer periods of time in the cooking process in order to deliver their flavour to the dish. They are excellent to use for braising, stewing and roasting but must not be too old. Bitterness or lack of flavour can be a factor depending upon the amount used

and the age of the herb sample.

Fresh herbs can also be lost if they try to do the job of dried herbs; they need to be treated differently. Thyme and bay leaves are great for doing double duty, however. A big bunch of fresh thyme tied in a bundle with a bay leaf or two, along with some long celery and carrot sticks will do wonders for a stock or soup and the string is handy when removing the spent herbs. When spring beckons in early March with the emergence of shoots and flowers, what better time to experiment with using fresh herbs as an impetus for new menu creations?

Get a mini home laboratory going: buy or grow fresh green herbs like tarragon, chives, cilantro, oregano, savoury, marjoram, basil, flat Italian parsley and then taste test them.

The easiest way to do this is to wash them in cool water, remove and drain them on a towel. Next, chop them up individually and add them, in a series of little bowls, to

a small mixture of mayonnaise spiked with a little lemon juice or good red wine vinegar.

In your taste lab you will get a chance to **experience the floral, earthy or pungent qualities of these herbs.** You will immediately know if you recognize and like the flavour of each herb and might remember when you tasted it before in a dried format.

It is vital to understand fresh herbs in order to get the best out of them. You'll need to recognize how potent they are or how delicate so that you can **determine for yourself what quantity is required for your purposes.**

Recipes will typically include a suggested herb, but you will be far more informed if you have a taste reference already stored in your mental library of flavours instead of relying on a book to tell you what to do.

I have a friend who thinks that more is always better when it comes

Classic Pairings for Herbs

Basil: works well with tomato, pork, seafood and as an herbal tea

Chervil: a beautifully delicate last-minute addition to soups, vinaigrettes, omelettes

Cilantro/Coriander: key ingredients in Mexican salsa and Thai dishes, along with hot peppers

Dill: salmon and herring. Great for cucumbers and egg salad

Marjoram and Oregano: all Mediterranean dishes

Parsley: mild flavour additive to all dishes

Rosemary: lamb, poultry, game meat, French and Italian soups

Tarragon: eggs, fish, seafood, turkey, rabbit, chicken, and Béarnaise sauce

Thyme: I use it in everything, if I can. It is a stable, flavour enhancer



Italian parsley

Rosemary

HERBS SOURCED FROM SOBEYS. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS

to food. He followed this spirit and added far, far too much marjoram to his veggie dip. Although it looked beautiful, dark green and very appetizing, it tasted like a puréed bunch of flowers. Had he used his palate, the most sophisticated guide to herbs in his possession, he would have used parsley for the colour and a sparing amount of marjoram for the flavour.

How do I know this? I learned it from my intimate, responsive approach to getting to know the pow-

er of the ingredients I use. Food preparation can be drudgery if one's creativity and personal knowledge is not a part of the equation.

If you're wondering what to do with your mayonnaise and herb test samples, blend them together and create your own version of a *salsa verde*. Get out the veggies and have a dip!

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