



PRESERVING HERBS



Gardeners can preserve herbs for use all year. We know that fresh herbs peak in flavor during summer, but New England summers don't last long. **Dried or frozen herbs are almost as good as when cut fresh from the garden.** They bring the sunshine and flavor of summer into winter!

Harvesting for Preserving

Herbs pack the most flavors when picked before they bloom, in the morning after the dew has dried, but anytime you feel the need, pick away!

Freezing Herbs

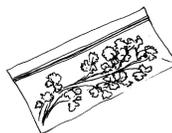
Freezing herbs is quick and easy!

- **Gather** leaves and short stems
- **Wash quickly + gently;** shake or pat dry.
- **Enclose in small freezer bags.** Leave air in as a cushion.
- **Tuck in the freezer.**

Freezing quickly captures the flavor and locks in the fresh look and taste instantly for enjoying months later. Freezing preserves the best flavor in **cilantro, chervil, chives, dill, fennel, sweet cicely, and tarragon.** When you gather herbs for a meal, harvest a little extra to toss in the freezer.

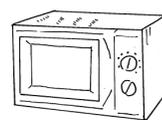
Using Frozen Herbs

Remove the bag from the freezer just before use. Open the bag and hit it with your hand on the counter. **You have crushed the ice crystals in the leaf, and *voila!* – chopped parsley, cilantro, dill...** Remove the chopped herb leaves; put the stems aside (to be used to flavor soup stock). Sprinkle the herbs on vegetables, salsas, soups and salads. **Frozen herbs retain better color and flavor the less they are cooked.**



Microwave Drying

Try drying herbs in a microwave oven. Wash sprigs, pat dry with paper towels. Remove leaves from stem, spread as a single layer evenly on double thickness paper towels. Cover with another paper towel and **microwave on high for 2 minutes.** Remove small dried leaves. **Continue drying at 30-second intervals** until all leaves are fully dried and brittle. **Store in airtight containers in a cool, dry place.**



Air Drying Herbs

Lavender, lemon verbena, lemon balm, lovage, marjoram, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, savory, and thyme dry well. For prime flavor and color, dry and store quickly!

To harvest, cut the stems just below the healthiest leaves. Tie the stems in a bunch, about 1" – 1 1/2" in diameter. Use a rubber band, which will tighten as the stems dry. **Hang bunches out of direct sunlight.** Sun and high heat (>110°F) will destroy essential oils. Ideal conditions, such as in sheds and attics, include good ventilation, temperatures between 75°-110°F, and low humidity.

Drying time, depending on humidity, usually takes 3-8 days. When the leaves crumble between your fingers, herbs are dry. **As soon as they are dry or almost dry, put them stem up in a paper bag.** The bag absorbs remaining moisture and buffers humidity until you prepare the herbs for storage.

As you have time, reach into the bag and **strip the leaves from the stems by running your clean hands over the leaves.** Pour dried leaves carefully into glass jars, cover and **store away from the light** or use dark glass jars. Sunlight, heat and excess handling will destroy herb oils. Stored carefully, herbs will retain their fragrance, taste and color **for about a year** - just in time for next year's harvest!



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