

Fresh Herbs Add Flavor Without the Calories

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Using fresh herbs in meals can enhance the appearance of foods as well as providing fantastic flavors, and even better...they do all this without adding extra calories! Herbs are easy to grow or can be purchased. But either way, adding fresh herbs is a quick way to transform ordinary meals into extraordinary meals.

Besides helping flavor foods when cutting back on salt, fat and sugar; herbs may also offer additional benefits of their own.

Researchers are finding many culinary herbs (both fresh and dried) have antioxidants that may help protect against such diseases as cancer and heart disease.



Take some thyme (pun intended!) to cook with fresh herbs. **Here are some tips to help you enjoy the flavor and health benefits of fresh herbs in your cooking.**

- 1. Purchase herbs close to the time you plan to use them.** Or, when growing herbs in your own garden, the ideal time for picking is in the morning after the dew has dried but before the sun gets hot. This helps ensure the best flavor and storage quality
- 2. Fresh herbs can be stored in an open or a perforated plastic bag in your refrigerator** crisper drawer for a few days.
- 3. Wait to wash herbs until you are ready to use them.** Wash smaller amounts of herbs thoroughly under running water. Shake off moisture or spin dry in a salad spinner. Pat off any remaining moisture with clean paper towels.
- 4. For most recipes, unless otherwise directed, mince herbs into tiny pieces.** Chop with a chef's knife on a cutting board or snip with a kitchen scissors. While some recipes call for a sprig or sprigs of herbs, normally the part of the herb you harvest will be the leaves. For herbs with

sturdier stems, such as marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage and thyme, you can strip off the leaves by running your fingers down the stem from top to bottom. With small-leaved plants such as thyme, you can use both leaves and stems for cooking early in the season. Later in the season, as the stems become tougher, use just the leaves. For herbs with tender stems, such as parsley and cilantro, it's OK if you snip some of the stem in with the leaves when you're cutting these herbs.

5. Unlike dried herbs, fresh herbs are usually added toward the end in cooked dishes to preserve their flavor. Add the more delicate herbs — basil, chives, cilantro, dill leaves, parsley, marjoram and mint — a minute or two before the end of cooking or sprinkle them on the food before it's served. The less delicate herbs, such as dill seeds, oregano, rosemary, tarragon and thyme, can be added about the last 20 minutes of cooking. Fresh herbs can be added to refrigerated cold foods several hours before serving.

6. A general guideline when using fresh herbs in a recipe is to use 3 times as much as you would use of a dried herb.

For more information about fresh herbs, go to University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension's Fact Sheet at: <http://food.unl.edu/documents/cookingfreshherbs-color2010.pdf>. Check their Web site for information about dried herbs and growing herbs as well.

For more information, contact the Wildcat Extension District offices at: Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Wilson County, 620-378-2167; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district.

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