

Culinary uses of herbs: Practical tips and creative ideas



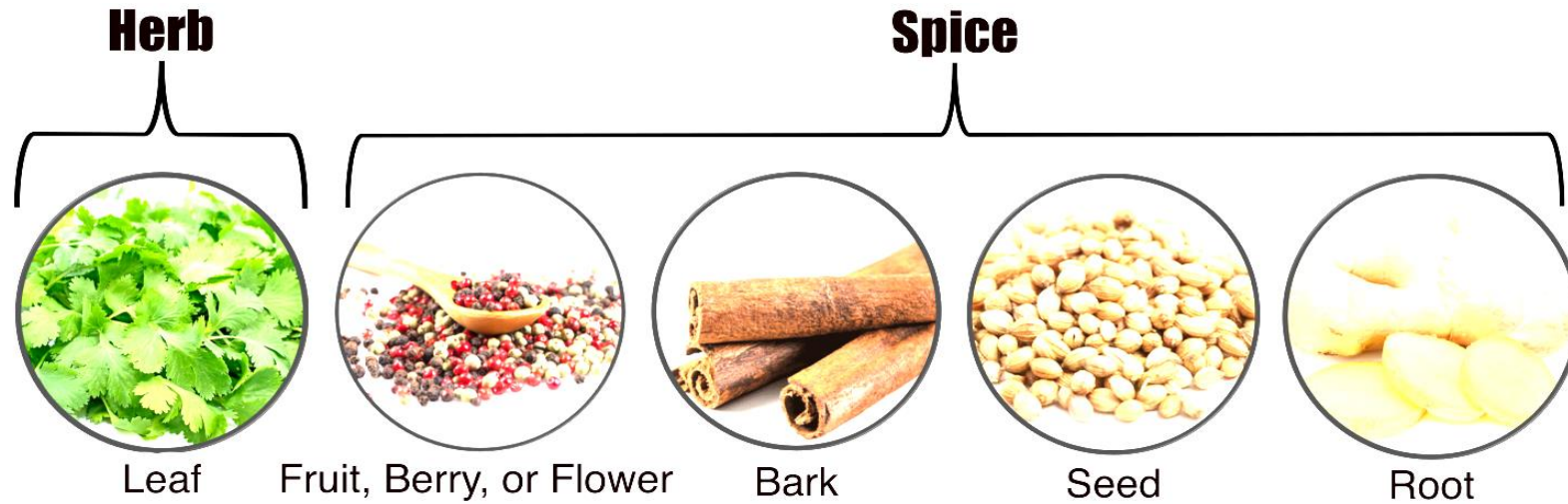
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Culinary uses of herbs: Practical tips and creative ideas



- How herbs, spices and aromatics contribute to flavor
- Perceptions of herbs/flavor vary and evolve individually and evolve across cultures
- Cultural perspectives on using, balancing and combining herbs
- How to use herbs harmoniously within a dish and across a meal
- Practical strategies and tips for cooking with herbs
- Creative ideas for using herbs

Working definition of herbs, spices and aromatics



- Herbs come from the stems/leaves of plants that usually do not have a woody stem and die down to the ground after flowering
- Spices come from roots, flowers, fruits, seeds, or bark
- Plants that give both: fennel, cilantro & dill
- Aromatics are herbs, spices, vegetables and sometimes meat

How herbs, spices & aromatics contribute to flavor



- Provide primary, complimentary, balancing or background flavors and aroma
- Aromatics - Often cooked in oil as a base for the flavor of a dish
- Today we typically use herbs and spices to enhance flavors and make good food taste even better
- Before refrigeration spices were often used to hide less fresh foods taste and flavors and to prolong the freshness of food

Flavor wheel examples



Pungent – Onions, Garlic, Mustard

Vegetal/Grassy – Parsley, Some EVOOs

Citrusy - Orange/Lemon, Lemongrass, Coriander

Breakdown of some Spice/Seasonings

- Gremolata – Pungent, Citrusy, Grassy
- Curry Powder – Pungent dominant, but lots going on
- Examples from audience?

Perceptions of herbs/flower vary & evolve individually



- Genetics - Taste bud density
- Genetics – Gene/allele expressions for bitter veg, cilantro...
- Age - As you age, taste discrimination tends to decrease
- Sinus & health issues, smoking, pregnancy, covid...
- Personal history and food associations

Super Tasters/High Taste Bud Density

- 25% of population
- Sugar is sweeter, sodium is saltier, bitterness is almost intolerable
- Coffee, hard liquor, sweet desserts, green vegetables too intense

Medium Tasters

- 50% of population
- Tend to have more diverse palate
- Not adverse to bitter or stronger tasting foods

Non Tasters/Low Taste Bud Density

- Low taste bud density - 25% of population
- Often complain food is bland and boring
- Tend to compensate by enjoying spice, heat and lots of seasoning

Perceptions of herbs/flavor vary across cultures



- Different ways of thinking about and balancing flavors
E.G. Europe, India, China, Middle East
- Spiciness and flavor preferences
- Local foods and terroir
- Spices, herbs & aromatics can vary depending on locale
E.G. Cinnamon, Oregano, Paprika

Different cultures approach/balance flavors differently



Europe/Traditional American

- Primary, Secondary and Supporting background flavors

India: Balances 6 flavor types and roles according to Aryurveda

- Sweet, Sour, Salty, Spicy/Pungent, Bitter and Astringent

China: Harmony of Flavor, texture, color, and aroma

- Flavors: Salty, Spicy, Sour, Sweet and Bitter

Middle Eastern: Wall of flavor

Different cultures approach/balance flavors differently



India: Six flavor types to balance

- Sour: mango powder, anardana, tamarind, citrus fruits, yogurt
- Sweet: cinnamon, cloves, cardamom
- Salty: Salt
- Spicy/Pungent: peppercorns, chiles, mustard seeds, asafoetida
- Bitter: turmeric, ajwain, fenugreek (methi)
- Astringent: turmeric, pomegranate, fennel, bay leaf, tea leaves

Different cultures approach/balance flavors differently



China: Harmony of flavor, texture, color, and aroma

Salty: Soy, Brine & Pickles

Spicy: Sichuan peppercorns, Chiles, Ginger, Horse Radish

Sour: Citrus, Tamarind, Cilantro

Sweet: Cinnamon, Anise

Bitter: Mustard, Greens

Chinese sauces balance many or many of these flavors

Using herbs harmoniously within a dish



- What herbs/spices go together in a dish can be highly subjective
- Can follow a particular cultural palate/approach - like paint families
- Choose primary, complimenting and balancing background flavors

Using herbs harmoniously across a meal



Bruschetta, roasted lamb, potatoes and vegetables

(Garlic, rosemary, mint, basil, thyme, marjoram, oregano, parsley)

Flow of a meal:

- Start off light and/or delicate
- Good strategy to build up to a crescendo
- Palate cleansers

Creatively adding herbs



- Why do some herbs go together better than others?
- What flavor notes are they adding and how will they balance?
- Consider how strong/intense each herb is
 - Sage, Rosemary, Thyme, Oregano, Basil,
 - Chives, Tarragon, Dill, Parsley
- Set aside a portion for experimenting and add herbs gradually

Good Cooks and Chefs



- Know and cook for their audience
- Describe food well to prepare diner's palates and maximize their experience
- Look for “sweet spots” between individuals and groups

Practical tips for cooking with herbs



- Dried vs. fresh herbs
- Whole herbs vs. chopped rough vs. chopped fine
- Ground vs. whole spices
- When to add herbs/spices in cooking process
- How to extract, infuse and develop flavors

- **Dried vs. fresh herbs**

- Fresh generally preferable except when used as aromatics
- Some herbs are better in dried form than others
- Dried herbs more concentrated - Use 2 – 3x as much fresh

- **Ground vs. whole spices**

- Whole spices need to cook longer and often must be removed
- For ground spices, fresh has best flavor and keeps fresh longer

- **Roasting w/herbs:** meat/poultry, seafood, veggies, nuts

- **Whole sprigs vs. bouquet garni vs. Sachet d'Epices**

Whole herbs vs. chopped rough vs. chopped fine



Whole herbs can give burst of flavor, but may over power

Chopped rough good for rustic dishes

- Can give little bursts of flavor, but less likely to overpower

Chopped fine good for more refined dishes

- Flavors blend more easily, especially stronger flavored herbs

Use **sharp knife** for chopping herbs – make sure herbs dry

When to add herbs/spices in the cooking process



- Aromatics, dried herbs and whole spices at beginning
- Flavors change and develop as the dish cooks
- Chefs sometimes add herbs/spices at beginning, middle and end
- Dried herbs sometimes added near end of cooking to boost flavor
- Fresh herbs often added near end of cooking
- More delicate fresh herbs are added right as heat is turned off
- Herbs and spices can be sauteed in oil or butter and added at end

How to extract/infuse and develop flavors



- Fats/Oils - great strategy because often herbs, spices and aromatics flavors come from oils in the plant
- Water/flavored liquids - good strategy for fresh or crushed dried herbs at end - May not get same flavor development
- Alcohol – great at developing and transforming flavors
- Consider combined approach

How alcohol develops flavors



- Alcohol adds flavor and complexity by bonding with fat and water molecules carrying flavors and aromas through the dish
- Used in marinades, poaching liquids, making pan sauces, desserts, Flambé...
- Most common use is deglazing, which adds depth of flavor

Creative uses for herbs and spices



- Herbal vinegars
- Herbal sugar and salt
- Simple syrups/flavored honeys
- Compound butters
- Flavored cream cheese, sour cream, goat cheese
- Salads/Salad dressings
- Pesto

Compound butters



- Mango, basil, sriracha
- Lemon, ginger, basil and mint or cilantro
- Parsley, chives, tarragon and/or dill
- Parsley, thyme, rosemary and/or sage
- Honey thyme or honey dill

Pesto - Not just basil!



- Herb (parsley, basil, sage, thyme, marjoram, garlic)
- Yellow tomato (basil, parsley, mint, garlic)
- Asparagus and spinach (plus pistachios and garlic)
- Pesto Trapanese (cherry tomatoes, basil, almonds, garlic)
- Green beans with mint pesto (mint, parsley, pine nuts)
- Chimichurri (basil, parsley, rosemary, thyme, cilantro, garlic)

Sweet applications for herbs and spices



- Adding herbs and spices to sweet dishes adds complexity
- A little bitter or spicy flavor can complement sweet flavors
- Nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, allspice, ginger, vanilla all great!
- Nutmeg, cinnamon and vanilla increase perceived sweetness
- Salt reduces bitterness, brings out flavors

Sweet combinations



Pear or Apple with Rosemary/Sage

- Apple pie, muffins or coffee cake with rosemary streusel
- Poached pears, ice cream and sage shortbread cookies

Peaches, Apricots, Plums and Tarragon

- Grilled apricots with tarragon-orange syrup and ice cream
- Peach and tarragon shortcake

Rhubarb strawberry crumble with mint whipped cream

Sweet combinations



Lemon and Basil, Mint or Bay

- Sorbet, granita, iced tea, lemonade
- Lemon, fresh bay leaf and olive oil cake

Citrus and Rosemary, Thyme or Mint

- Orange or lemon and thyme pignoli/pine nut cookies
- Lemon pound cake with mint glaze
- Mojitos and other cocktails

Sweet combinations



Cherries and Sage

- Cherry pie with sage, walnut, brown sugar crumble topping
- Cherry sage sangria
- Cherry sage ginger and lime smash
- Seared duck breast with cherries, sage & Port wine reduction

Lavender thyme cookies, cupcakes

Lavender mint shrub, lemonade, iced tea

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Thanks for coming!

Q & A?