

# THE HERBAL HARVEST

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**If the day and the night are such that you greet them with joy,  
and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs.....**

**That is your success.**

---Henry David Thoreau

The herb garden is a wondrous place. An intense sensual pleasure awaits one who brushes against a lavender or lemon verbena brush or steps onto a patch of mint or thyme. A variety of colors, plant forms, and delicate blooms delights the eye. But the glory of herbs doesn't end in the garden but is continued throughout one's home as these delightful plants are harvested and transformed into foods, decorations and perfumes.

Centuries ago, people learned the healing properties of herbs and those particular plants were carefully harvested and stored for medicinal use. Culinary and cosmetic uses were then discovered and utilized and herbs became important in the cultures of many people and were integrated into religion and folklore.

In recent years herbs have become increasingly popular, grown and utilized commercially, and also incorporated into home landscapes and enjoyed for their many and varied properties—their flavor, fragrance and appearance. Their connections to the ancient cultures, to our past, makes the herbal harvest especially satisfying.

## CULINARY HARVEST

It's difficult to determine whether herbs are more highly prized for their flavors or fragrances, but certainly the culinary aspect is one herbs' greatest gifts.

### Preserving Herbs

To harvest herbs for drying, cut the plant back by 1/3 just before the flowers are ready to open, as the leaves will have their greatest concentration of oil then. Chives should be cut to the ground, and mints and marjoram can be cut to 1 inch above ground level. Lavender flowers should be harvested when the bloom is just about one third open. Hang to dry, then rub off the flowers and store in air-tight jars or bags, Hidcote, an English lavender and Provence are best for cooking.

Secure bunches of herbs with rubber bands and hang in a ventilated room away from direct sunlight. Harvest herbs in the morning after the dew has dried.

### Storage

To retain the fresh taste of your herbs, store them in tight-fitting containers in a cabinet away from light. Herbs deteriorate quickly when exposed to air, heat and light. Herb butters can be made and frozen.

## **Herb Butters**

Herb butters can be made of a single herb or a combination and used to enhance breads, muffins, pastas and vegetables. They are quick and easy to make and may be frozen for several months. During the Middle Ages butter was wrapped in sorrel leaves and emersed in earthenware pots filled with salt water. The reason was to keep the butter fresh tasting

Basic Butter Recipe: 1 pound butter, 2 teaspoons lemon juice, 10 Tablespoons chopped fresh herbs or 5 Tablespoons dried (I always use fresh herbs) My favorite herb butter includes rosemary, oregano and a few cloves of garlic. Place softened butter and herbs in food processor and blend. Shape into a log or ball, fill molds, or place in mini muffin pans and place in refrigerator to harden. Remove butter from pans/molds and freeze in plastic bags.

Lemon Verbena Butter: Blend 6 Tbl soft butter with 2 T minced lemon verbena with 2 T orange zest and a little honey to sweeten. Use on muffins and biscuits.

## **Herbal Blends**

Blending herbs and spices for seasoning meats and vegetables was added to the cook's repertoire during the Middle Ages. Once thought as a way to cover the flavor of slightly "off" meats, the herbs soon became appreciated for the additional flavor they imparted. Make your blends from freshly dried herbs and blend in small amounts to retain flavor and color. Store in airtight containers, away from sunlight.

Bouquet Garni a traditional French seasoning for soups and stews. Combine: 1/4Cup dried parsley, 4 bay leaves, 2 T dried thyme, 2 T dried marjoram. Crush leaves and blend. Place a tablespoon into a 4 inch square of cheesecloth and tie with a string. The recipe should make 10 bags.

Italian Blend: Use on pizzas, pastas, herb breads. Mix and store in containers.

1/2Cup dried oregano, 1/2Cup dried basil, 1/4Cup dried rosemary, 1/4Cup dried parsley

## **HERB BREAD**

**Ingredients:** sugar, yeast, warm water, fine salt, sea salt , fresh basil, fresh rosemary, sun-dried tomatoes (drain oil), bread flour or all-purpose flour, olive oil

Put 1/2 teaspoon sugar into small bowl, pour 1/3 Cup warm water over it, then sprinkle on 1 & 1/2 teaspoons dried yeast. Stir and let sit for 10 to 15 minutes until frothy. In another bowl, put 6 Cups flour, 3 Tablespoons chopped fresh basil, 2 Tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary, and 1/2 Cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes. Add 1/3 cup virgin olive oil, the yeast mixture and then gradually mix in 2 Cups warm water and stir. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead for 5 minutes, until smooth and elastic. Put dough back into the bowl, cover and let rise for about 40 minutes.

Knead the dough again until smooth, then cut into two pieces and form into oval loaves and place on oiled baking sheet. Slash the top of each loaf with a knife in a criss-cross pattern, loosely cover and let rise for about 15 minutes. Preheat oven to 400. Brush the loaves with a little olive oil and sprinkle with a little chopped rosemary and sea salt crystals. Bake for about 25 minutes until golden brown. Enjoy!

## **Herbal Jellies**

Delightful to use, these also make unique gifts as they are rarely produced commercially. There is an incredible number of flavors to make, either with water or fruit juice. My personal favorites are rose geranium, lavender and lemon verbena. Jellies may be colored by using herb and flower blossoms or food coloring. Have fun!

**Rose Geranium Jelly** Pour 2 Cups boiling water over 1 cup crushed rose geranium leaves. Let stand 15 minutes. Strain liquid from leaves, adding water to make 2 cups if necessary. Combine this with 1 cup rice or distilled white vinegar, 6 & 1/2Cups sugar. Bring to hard, boil stirring constantly. When the boil can't be stirred down, add 6 ounces liquid pectin. Return to a hard boil that can't be stirred down and boil exactly one minute, remove pan from heat. Skim off foam and if desired add a little red food coloring to make jelly pink (or red pineapple sage blooms can be used for a natural color when you make the infusion) and pour into hot sterilized jelly jars. Leave 1/2 inch head space and seal at once with sterilized canning lids.

**Basil Jelly** Follow above recipe just use any type basil leaf instead of geranium. If desired add green food coloring. Opal basil makes a lovely garnet color.

**Lemon Verbena Jelly** Pour 2 and ½ Cups boiling water over 2 cups torn lemon verbena leaves, cover and steep 15 minutes. Strain and measure out 2 cups. Add 4 1/2Cups sugar and 1/4Cup cider vinegar. Bring to boil over high heat stir constantly. When it's at a full boil add 3 ounces liquid pectin. Bring to full rolling boil and boil hard for one minute stirring constantly. Pour into sterilized jars and seal. This makes a lovely soft yellow color though you may add coloring if you want a deep color.

**Lavender Jelly** Pour 2 Cups water over 1/2Cup English lavender (Hidcote is best, makes a nice lavender color) and steep 15 minutes. Strain out 1 and ½ 1/2Cups liquid. Add 1/4Cup cider vinegar, 4 Cups sugar and follow above directions.

### **Herbal Vinegars**

Flavored vinegars can be used not only in salad dressings and marinades but can add zest to sauces and soups. Vinegar can replace all or part of the wine called for in a recipe and is good for deglazing pans. Use high quality fruit or red or white wine vinegar or rice wine vinegar.

**Method:** Place 2 cups fresh herbs in glass jar or bottle and pour 1 quart vinegar over them. Set in sunny window for 2 weeks. Or heat vinegar and pour over herbs and let steep for a few days. Pour through coffee filter into clean sterilized jars and add fresh herb sprig if desired.

### **Herbal Sugars**

Most people think of herbs as for use in only savory dishes but of course that is not true! Herbs are used in many desserts, either directly or by flavoring sugars, honey, syrups. Use flavored sugars in cookie and recipes or to flavor drinks. Flavor either powdered sugars (used in frostings) or granulated sugars.

**Rose Geranium Sugar:** Place alternate layers of rose-scented leaves and sugar in a glass jar. Cover tightly and leave for a week or longer. Sift out herbs before using.

**Lavender Sugar:** Mix 1/2Cup lavender flowers with 1 cup white sugar together in jar. After a week, sift out lavender.

## HERBAL COSMETICS

Using herbs to condition your hair, soothe the skin and for bathing has a history that dates back to the time of the Pharaohs. Mint, marjoram, roses, lavender and other herbs have long been used for their cosmetic value. Use herbal infusions as hair rinses or skin toners.

Method: Pour 4 cups boiling water over 1 cup fresh herbs. Let steep for 30 minutes and strain. Use lemon verbena, lavender or rose geranium for a hair rinse. Use rosemary for dark hair. Lavender is also good for oily skin; comfrey heals and soothes the skin; chamomile is lightly astringent and softens the skin.

A famous French courtesan Ninon de Lenclos had a secret bath blend of herbs that was rumored to be the reason she was to stay youthful looking! Try her bath blend which consisted of mint, lavender, thyme, rosemary and comfrey. Place a cup of this mix in a muslin or cheesecloth bag and let warm water run over it in the bath—it will be a fragrant and soothing experience, even if it does not allow you to become as famous as Ninon de Lenclos!

Anne (Ninon) de Lenclos (1615-1705) was a leader of Parisian society in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a mistress of many influential men. In her salon she entertained the famous people of the day—writers, artists, politicians. At the age of 70 she seduced a young lover, who lost a bet to a friend that he could resist her charms—he couldn't! She is quoted as saying "We should take care to lay in a stock of provisions, but not of pleasures; these should be gathered day by day."

## SACHETS AND SWEET BAGS

Unlike flower scents, leaf odors are quite permanent and have always been popular for use in cushions, bedding and little sweet bags that were meant to keep things fresh and bug-free. Make elegant sachets from beautiful velvets, silks and satins or make simple sweet bags of vintage hankies or other fabrics. Use squares of muslin to tie up bunches of santolina and lavender to repel moths in closets. Make little "toe sachets" to stuff in your shoes. Elegant sachets or large sweet bags of beautiful fabrics can be hung on door knobs or furniture. There are exquisite fabrics and ribbons available to make exceptional sachets and bags which can be further enhanced with hand-made ribbon flowers or vintage velvet flowers. Try Britex in San Francisco for fabrics and check antique shops for vintage faux flowers.

## DECORATIVE HERBS

There are a great many ways to use herbs in decorations—wreaths, garlands, swags, sprays, baskets. Here are two additional suggestions for using herbs decoratively.

**Harvest Cornucopia** Use a 12x12 inch square of quality embossed or vellum paper (available in a variety of colors and designs at specialty paper stores). Fold into a cornucopia and glue closed. With a paper punch, place a hole on either side at the top and thread a one inch wired French ribbon through to form a hanger. Fill generously with a variety of herbs. For the harvest theme, add wheat, perhaps colored leaves and berries—whatever you like.

**Herb Bread Basket** Preheat oven to 350. Invert a 1 & 1/2 quart ovenproof bowl on a cookie sheet. Cover bowl with foil, molding to sides. Unroll 2 eleven ounce cans refrigerated soft bread sticks and separate into 16 strips. Roll strips in mixture of chopped dried savory herbs (Italian mix) or chopped rosemary. Start at bottom of bowl & wrap strips of dough around bowl, twisting as you wrap. Bake 20 minutes. Cool 5 minutes. Brush basket with 1 egg beaten with 1 Tbl water. Bake an additional 7 to 10 minutes till golden brown. Cool completely. Remove bread from bowl and peel away foil. Fill with home-made herbal muffins and breads at your holiday meals!

**French Herbal Standing Bouquet** Dried grasses, herbs and flowers make a beautiful display. Take time in constructing to achieve the right balance. First separate flowers and foliage into piles and trim stems. Select 2-3 stems of each variety to make a small bunch as the beginning of the bouquet; hold everything tightly in one hand. Initially keep all flower heads level. 2. Continue to add stems, but change the angle just a little every time you add more material to the bouquet. As you build up the shape, lower the flower heads slightly. When you have used all your supply, tie the bundle with a long floral wire very firmly. Trim the stems so that the bouquet stands on its own. Then add a raffia or ribbon bow.

**Harvest Lights** This is a perfect way to showcase fall's splendor. Small glass cylinders are placed inside larger ones to create display "windows" for oak leaves, stalks of wheat or sprigs of herbs. Ivory pillar candles complete the arrangement. Place a number of these lights down the center of a table or group 3 on a side table. Cut wheat heads and drop between the gap between the cylinders, making sure no part extends over the rim (for safety reasons) In other cylinder, drop oak leaves. In others try sprigs of rosemary.

