

Cooking with Herbs and Spices

"Variety is the Spice of Life"

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Herbs and Spices Defined:

- **Herbs** are the leaves of low growing shrubs and can be used fresh or dried. Common examples include sage, parsley, basil, oregano, rosemary, dill, and thyme. Many herbs can be grown both indoors and outdoors.
- **Spices** come from the bark, root, buds, seeds, berry or fruit of tropical plants and trees. Examples include cinnamon, ginger, cloves, pepper, paprika, garlic, mustard and many more.
- **Seasoning blends** are a mixture of dried herbs and spices.

The old saying "variety is the spice of life" holds true in every aspect of life, including diet. Health experts recommend eating a variety of foods with many colors and flavors as a part of a healthy lifestyle. Herbs and spices are a powerful tool to diversify your plate and palate and have been used for over 4,000 years!

The benefits of cooking with herbs and spices go far beyond adding color and flavor to meals. Not only are herbs and spices used to add variety and replace extra fat, sugar and salt in meals, but they also provide powerful antioxidants while adding virtually no calories.

Cooking with herbs and spices is a fun and easy way to diversify meals in a healthy way. This month's edition of Healthy Eating Tip of the Month offers insight on the many health benefits of cooking with herbs and spices as well as tips on how to incorporate them into your diet.

Health Benefits

Cardiac Health

Using herbs and spices to add flavor to meals is a great way to decrease salt intake. Decreasing salt intake is important for many reasons:

- Salt can increase blood pressure, especially in salt sensitive people.
- High blood pressure is the #1 risk factor for stroke.
- High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease.

A low sodium diet may help reduce your risk of heart disease, as well as stroke. The American Heart Association recommends eating less than 1500mg a day. Using herbs and spices instead of salt is a healthy and delicious way to decrease sodium intake and decrease your risk of heart disease.

According to the American Spice Trade Association (ASTA), spices such as *black pepper, garlic powder, curry powder, cumin, dill seeds, basil, ginger, coriander and onion* are the most effective dried herbs and spices in replacing the taste of salt.



*An herb is the friend of physicians
and the praise of cooks."*

—
Charlemagne



Herbs — An Overview

Growing Herbs Outdoors

Soil — drainage is probably the single most important factor followed by a neutral pH of 6.5 to 7.0.

Fertilizer — The soil does not have to be fertile, so use little or not fertilizer. Exceptions would be chervil, fennel, lovage and summer savory which require moderate amounts of fertilizer.

Location — Full sun is generally best or at least 6 hours of sunlight per day. Plant potential invasive herbs, like mint, in containers.

Insects — Very few insects, mites, or diseases attack herbs. Some herbs such as garlic are used in organic pest management formulas.

Aphids may feed on anise, caraway, dill, parsley, and fennel.

Others that may become pests are slugs, white flies, scale and thrips. In hot weather, spider mites may be a problem.

Diseases, other than root problems due to wet soil or potting mix, are uncommon in the herb family.

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Did you know that there are over 3,200 different kinds of mint?

Most herbs are in two or more categories:

- **Aromatic** — Lavender, mint, marjoram, rosemary, & basil
- **Culinary** — Sage, basil chives, dill, thyme, savory, mint, & rosemary
- **Medicinal** — Before using herbs for medicinal purposes, consult with your health care professional.
- **Ornamental** — Grown for fresh or dried arrangements for flowers or foliage—examples are thyme, rosemary mint, lavender, & chives.



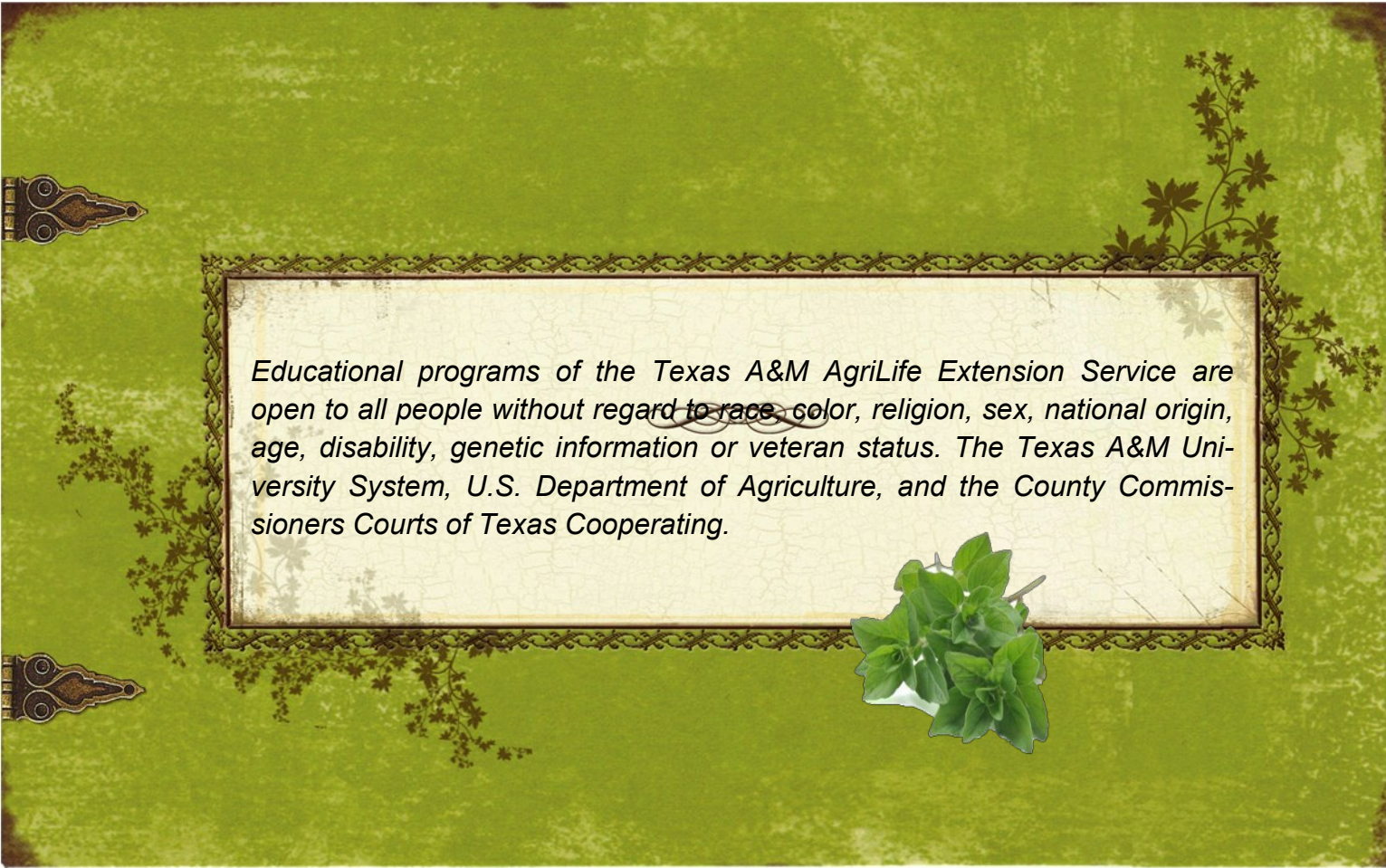
Harvesting & Storing

During the season, you may pick fresh leaves as soon as the plant has enough foliage to maintain growth.


Harvest herbs in the morning when the herbs' essential oils are at their highest concentration.

You can preserve many herbs for future use by drying or freezing them. Basil is basically devoid of flavor if


dried, so use it fresh or freeze it one of two ways — as pesto, or in an ice cube tray as chopped leaves covered in water.



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