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EDITORS AUDREY PERKINS
KATHRINE SCHMILZE
ARTS@IDSNEWS.COM



CHEAP GOURMET

By Audrey Perkins | audperki@indiana.edu | @AudreyNLP
& Allison Wagner | allmwag@indiana.edu | @allisonmwagner

These four herbs can reinvent anyone’s cooking. For an extra dollar or two, take a bunch of herbs and make any dish look and taste gourmet. Most herbs can be used fresh without any cooking involved.

SALMON WITH CILANTRO SAUCE

This is one of the most inexpensive herbs to use. One large bunch is about a dollar. In the recipe pictured, the tartness of the cilantro pesto soothes the fishy taste of salmon. Slightly sour, the cilantro pesto offers a fresh taste to a meal and can also be used as a salad dressing. The citrus flavor and aroma of cilantro would pair well with tilapia or steak. You can garnish tacos with it, too.

Ingredients

1 1/2 - 2 cups chopped, fresh cilantro
Juice of one lemon
3 cloves garlic
About 1/3 cup olive oil, add more if the cilantro does not break down easily



1 tablespoon honey
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

1 Add all ingredients into a food processor.
2 Blend until everything liquefies. If the cilantro isn’t blending well, add more oil until the mix moves smoothly.
3 Taste as you go. If the flavor is too oily, add

more lemon juice. If the flavor is too sour, add more honey. The sauce will turn mildly creamy as the oil aerates and is combined with the acidity of the lemon juice.

Watch how to prepare cilantro pesto

Visit idsnews.com to learn how to prepare this dish by watching Audrey Perkins in an online video.

ROSEMARY DIP



The musky flavor of the rosemary pairs well with smooth olive oil. In turn, the cracked salt and pepper enhances the sharp flavor of rosemary. This herb can help lighten any heavy dish. Rosemary is also a great addition to a buttered noodle recipe or to a fresh pasta dish with an oil-based sauce.

Ingredients

1 tablespoon finely chopped rosemary
¼ cup olive oil, one that is more green in color is preferable as it has more flavor
Salt and pepper to taste
Optional, fresh artisan bread

Directions

1 Mix the first three ingredients. Let sit for 30 minutes to infuse.
2 Serve with warm bread. Ideally, this should be one of the crustier breads found in the bakery section of the grocery store.

MINT LENTIL SOUP

Mint balances the flavors in a meal and does not need to be limited to just sweet foods. Commonly used in Middle Eastern cuisine, mint aids in digestion and helps enhance the strong flavors of other herbs. For other recipe ideas, add mint leaves to tea or lemonade for a cool, soothing effect.

Ingredients

2 cups dry red lentil beans
4 cups broth of your choice, plus additional water as needed
½ red onion, finely chopped
Juice and zest of one lemon
1 cup chopped, fresh mint
3 tablespoons butter
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

1 Melt butter in large saucepan. Add red onion. Sauté until the onion is fragrant and almost clear. Add the lentils, mint and lemon zest. Continue sautéing an additional minute while stirring vigorously. Do not let the starch in the beans burn.
2 Add the lemon juice and broth. Stir well. Add salt and pepper — make sure to season during the entire cooking process to make sure the flavor is developing properly. Cook the soup for about 30 minutes or until the lentils are plump and tender. Add more water as the broth is absorbed — never let the beans dry out.



3 If you do not have a blender, you can stop here when the beans are cooked. However, for those who do have even a Magic Bullet or similar product, take about half of the soup and blend it into a

smooth puree. Return the ground soup back into the pan, add more water and continue cooking another five minutes. This will allow the beans to continue breaking down and create a smoother consistency.

STRAWBERRY BASIL WATER

Fresh basil tastes sweet and slightly peppery. While commonly used in marinara sauce or tomato soup, it can be used in other foods. In this recipe, it lends a floral sweetness that takes ordinary tap water to a new level.



Ingredients

1 small bunch fresh basil
5 strawberries, thinly sliced
4-5 cups water

Directions

1 Throw all ingredients into a large carafe or bottle. Let sit for 30 minutes.

2 Enjoy. This recipe can also substitute any other herb or fruit. To change things up, chop up a grapefruit and add it into the mix. Have woodier herbs like rosemary? Bruise them by tapping them with the back of a large knife to release their flavor before dropping into the water.