

Title:

Herb Blends and How To Use Them

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847

Summary:

All good cooks want their dishes to have distinctive flavors. To achieve this you should use fresh or dried herbs for a subtle change in taste. This article shows you how to use herbs to liven up your culinary repertoire.

Keywords:

Herbs, fresh herbs, recipe, spice, cooks, blends of herbs, bouquet garni, herb bouquet, flavor, garni, spices, fine Herbes, Herbes de Provence, gourmet shop, mild herbs, robust herbs, flavored oil, flavored vinegar

Article Body:

Sometimes you just get tired of using the same old recipe that tastes the same time after time. But we are all so busy we are looking for easy ways to spice up are repertoire. One way that many cooks forget is to use blends of herbs to add subtle flavor distinctions. The French have been doing this forever.

The French never use just one herb in there dishes but rather a blend of herbs that they call a "bouquets garni". Don't be put off by that fancy name, it simply means a bouquet of herbs. The blend of herbs adds subtle but distinct flavors to every dish you prepare. The trick is to get the right blend for so no one herb dominates the dish. You want the flavors to be delicate.

With just a few herb bouquets you can change the taste of a recipe instantly. Now, old recipes have added spark and will get you plenty of "This is Greats". Your aim here is to create a complex flavor that is balanced making each guest want to instantly take another bite. Of course there is different garni for each recipe. You want to achieve the right herbs and spices that compliment each other. You want to use the right relationship between quantities of each herb you are using.

For meat based casseroles, stews, stocks and soup, the old tried and true garni of parsley, thyme and bay leaf still apply. But go one step further and add a twist of citrus (lime, lemon, or orange) for a little zip. The formula for this garni is 3 sprigs of parsley, 1 sprig of thyme and 1 bay leaf. Get a piece of cooking string and tie the bundle together. Viola, just add the bundle to your

dish and remove it before serving. Please use fresh herbs, they're so much better. If you have to use dried, sprinkle the herbs into a patch of cheesecloth and tie the cloth together with the string. .Fine Herbes and Herbes de Provence are to other bouquets that the French use in their cooking.

You can buy these at the grocery store or a gourmet shop but why not make your own. Finely chop fresh oregano, thyme, marjoram, savory, and marjoram for Herbes de Provence. Add one tablespoon of each to your dish. This combination can also be used in salads, meat dishes and vegetables.

The English version of Herbes de Provence is sage, rosemary, marjoram, Italian parsley chives, tarragon and thyme. Mix them all together and use on lamb, pork or in stuffing.

For Fine Herbes, mix together chopped parsley, tarragon, chives and chervil. Experiment with the quantities. Be adventurous! Keep careful notes when you are experimenting so that you can duplicate the successes and toss the disasters. Remember that creating beautiful tasty dishes is a more of a craft than an art.

You will need to identify the flavor and strength of each herb so that you can group them into either mild or robust. Examples of mild herbs are basil, bay leaf, chervil dill, and marjoram. These herbs combine well with most other herbs and their flavors become milder during the cooking process. With mild herbs you can use larger amounts and with more variation. They can also be used in salads and other dishes where the leaves are not cooked or briefly cooked.

Your robust herbs stand up to cooking. Often, they are used for braised or roasted meat or domestic fowl, soups, stews and even grilled foods. You will have work on the recipe since sometime the herbs alter subtly during the cooking process. They will either become more muted or in some cases intensify. They can always be combined with the mild herbs. Robust herbs include sorrel, rosemary, garlic, oregano, sage, tarragon and thyme.

Another cool easy to use fresh herbs is to flavor oil or vinegar with a blend of either mild or robust herbs. You will need pretty glass jars (preferable dark) and a tight seal. Simply put your combination of herbs in the jar, add the oil or vinegar, seal and let it sit for several weeks. Oils should be stored in the refrigerator. The herbs will add a subtle flavor to the liquid and will be delicious in a variety of ways.

You can make really healthy tinctures with fresh herbs. But I would urge you to master the cooking with herbs before you branch out to other areas. By knowing exactly how each herb flavors each dish you will instinctually know what to use

in tinctures.

Again be adventurous, mix and match, keep trying new things and keep notes so your successes can be repeated. After you have mastered cooking with herbs, who knows? Maybe you will start an herb garden so you will always have fresh delicious herbs on hand.

Here's to Good Cooking!

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