



Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article April 17, 2017

Herbs in Your Kitchen

by Peg Martinez

Everyone loves an herb garden. Today, I am going to tell you how to grow, preserve and enjoy your favorite herbs.

First, choose your favorite herbs to plant. I have rosemary, sage, oregano, thyme, parsley, basil, chives, and cilantro. Mix and match your herbs to make beautiful and fun container gardens. Or, plant your herbs right in the ground.



How can you preserve herbs for future use? There are many ways to preserve herbs. Drying them is my favorite. Different ways to dry them are: indoor air drying, solar drying, refrigerator drying, dehydrating with a machine, oven drying or microwave drying. I personally prefer the indoor air drying method.

It is best to harvest your herbs mid-morning. Once they are fully dried, they will remain potent for six to 12 months, and are safe from bacteria, mold and yeast.

I traditionally dry my herbs on my dining room table next to a sunny window, placing them on cheesecloth or paper towels and leaving them there for at least a week. You may also tie the herbs up with twist ties or a thin gauge wire and hang them upside down in a warm, dry place. Once you have fully dried your herbs, you can store them in air-tight jars. They are ready for use.

You can also freeze fresh herbs in ice cube trays with olive oil. Place your favorite herbs, such as rosemary, basil, or thyme, finely chopped or left as leaves, in ice cube trays. Pack the wells about 2/3 full of herbs then pour extra virgin olive oil over them. Cover the tray with plastic wrap and place the tray on a shelf in your freezer. I usually leave them in the freezer overnight, then remove them from the tray and place them in a freezer bag and place them back in the freezer. They are ready for cooking. This is great for winter stews, roasts, soups, and meat or potato dishes. I even place one under the skin of my chicken before roasting.

You may also use herbs to infuse vinegar. Herbal vinegars can be used in virtually every aspect of cooking, and they are easy to make. You can use a delicate rice wine vinegar or a robust red wine vinegar with different combinations of herbs and spices. When using fresh herbs, use about one cup of loosely packed leaves to two cups of vinegar. For dried herbs, use 1/2 cup herbs with two cups of vinegar.

Place the herbs in a clean, sterilized jar and use a spoon to bruise them slightly. Do not heat the vinegar. Cover tightly. Place the jar in a dark place and let the mixture steep at room temperature. Shake the jar every couple of days, taste the vinegar, and when it reaches your desired taste, it is done. The process may take up to three weeks or longer. When the taste is right for you, strain the vinegar and fill clean sterilized bottles, then cap them and place labels on them. Decorate the bottles for gifts.

Now it is up to you to grow your favorite herbs, then to harvest and enjoy them. There will be various herbs, in addition to trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, and vegetables, available at the HCMGA Plant Sale on Saturday, April 22, 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Henderson County Senior Citizens Center, 3344 Hwy 31E, Athens.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org.