

HEALTHY EATING

April is

- Cancer Control Month
- Celery Month
- Garden Month
- Pecan Month
- Soyfoods Month
- Stress Awareness Month

Hear! Hear! For Fresh Herbs

“An herb is the friend of physicians and the praise of cooks.” ~Charlemagne

If you'd like to “garden” but feel you don't have room, try planting herbs. They're like mini-vegetables, easily grown in a pot, and very forgiving if you occasionally neglect them.

Best yet, they add flavor and color to foods without adding sugar and fat calories or salt. Here's a potato I “nuked” in the microwave and topped with yogurt, presented with and without chopped chives. That little sprinkle of green makes all the difference in appearance and flavor!

Looking for a spot for growing herbs? They need at least 6 hours of direct sunlight daily. No place to plant? Put them in a pot.



Thyme is a hardy perennial herb and looks beautiful grown in a pot.

Add a little extra color by combining herbs with a flower that requires the same amount of sunlight, type of soil, and watering schedule. Check with your local Extension Office or garden store for more information about plants that go together well in your area.

Cooking with Fresh Herbs

For best quality, fresh herbs can be stored in a perforated plastic bag in your refrigerator crisper drawer for about a week. Perforated plastic bags (bags with small holes in them) allow some air to move in and out of the bag yet retain most of the moisture in the bag.

This helps prevent condensation within the bag and reduces shriveling. Either purchase perforated bags or follow these directions from University of Wisconsin Extension to make a perforated bag:

“You can make holes using a standard paper punch or a sharp object such as a pen, pencil, or knife. Punch holes approximately every 6 inches through both sides of the bag. If using a knife to create the openings, make two cuts — in an 'X' shape — for each hole to ensure good air circulation.”

Wash herbs in a clean colander under running water, tossing them around so all surfaces are rinsed well. Consumer Reports recommends, “If greens are particularly dirty, loosen dirt and sand by swishing them in a clean bowl of water (not the sink), then rinsing.” I like to use the removable strainer basket from my salad spinner for washing herbs. And, then use the basket to spin my herbs dry in my salad spinner.

Pat herbs dry with paper towels or use a salad spinner. Before buying a salad spinner, give it a



A sprinkling of herbs adds color and flavor.

spin at the store to test if it spins easily.

A quick way to cut herbs is with a kitchen scissors. For some dishes, you can cut the herb directly over the food itself.

Some general guidelines for cooking with fresh herbs are:

■ **Use three times as much as of a dried herb. For example, if a recipe called for 1 teaspoon of a dried herb, use about 3 teaspoons of a fresh herb.** The drying process reduces the size of dried herbs, making their flavor more concentrated.

■ Add more delicate herbs a minute or two before the end of cooking or sprinkle on food just before it is served. Examples include basil, chives, dill leaves, parsley, and mint.

■ Less delicate herbs can be added about the last 20 minutes of cooking. Examples include oregano, rosemary, thyme, and sage.



Add more delicate herbs, such as basil, a minute or two before the end of cooking or sprinkle on the food just before serving.

For many recipes, it's not important to be exact with the amount of an herb. Just sprinkle in a little for color and flavor. Popular herb and food combinations include:

- **Basil:** A natural snipped in with tomatoes; terrific in fresh pesto; other possibilities include pasta sauce, peas, zucchini
- **Chives:** Dips, potatoes, tomatoes
- **Mint:** Carrots, fruit salads, parsley, peas, tabbouleh, tea
- **Oregano:** Peppers, tomatoes
- **Parsley:** The curly leaf is the most common, but the flat-leaf or Italian parsley is more strongly flavored and often preferred for cooking. Natural for parsley include potato salad, tabbouleh, egg salad sandwiches
- **Rosemary:** Chicken, fish, lamb, pork, roasted potatoes, soups, stews, tomatoes
- **Thyme:** Eggs, lima beans, potatoes, poultry, summer squash, tomatoes

Healthy Seasonal Cooking during the Spring

Rhubarb Strawberry Cake

Serves 12 - 16

Ingredients:

- 3 cups sliced rhubarb
- 1 cup fresh strawberries, sliced
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 box yellow or white cake mix

Directions:

1. Combine strawberries, rhubarb, and sugar and stir, set aside.
 2. Make cake mix according to package directions.
 3. Pour strawberry rhubarb mixture into a 13 x 9 inch baking dish. Pour cake batter over fruit.
- Bake at 350 degrees for 40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center and comes out clean.

