

Fresh Picks – Herbs

Herbs enhance the flavors of food.

Fresh herbs: Select cuttings with evenly colored leaves with no sign of wilting or yellowing. Wrap in barely damp paper toweling and refrigerate in a plastic bag for up to 4 days. Or, store in a bunch – stems down, in a glass of water with a plastic bag over the leaves. Refrigerate in this way for up to a week – changing water every 2 days.

Dried herbs: Store in a cool, dark place for no more than 6 months to conserve flavors and aromas.

If using fresh herbs in a cooked dish, add them toward the end of the cooking time so that the delicate flavors are not lost.

Dried herbs can stand up to longer cooking.

BASIL

*A key herb in Mediterranean cooking, and essential to Italian pesto. Most varieties have green leaves and a pungent flavor that some describe as a cross between licorice and cloves. However, additional varieties are being introduced – with variations in leaf coloring and flavor.

*Dried basil bears little resemblance in flavor or aroma to the fresh herb.

*Blends well with tomatoes and garlic.

*Complements any type of meat or poultry, shellfish and many vegetables. *Fresh leaves can be used as a flavorful salad ingredient: try them layered with fresh tomatoes.

CILANTRO (Coriander Leaves)

Also called Chinese parsley, fresh cilantro or coriander looks similar to flat-leaf parsley – but can be distinguished by its pungent fragrance. Fresh cilantro is a key ingredient in Mexican, Indian, and Chinese cooking. Cilantro retains very little of its flavor when dried, so use fresh if possible.

Add chopped cilantro just before serving to salsa, stir-fries, legume or rice salads, or hot cooked rice; sprinkle over grilled chicken or fish, or a dish of ripe tomatoes.

FENNEL

*There are two parts of this plant that can be used: celery-like stems and feathery foliage.

*“Florence fennel” has a broad, bulbous base that’s treated like a vegetable. The base and stems can be eaten raw in salads or cooked in a variety of methods – braising, sautéing or in soups. The foliage can be used as a garnish or snipped like dill and used for a flavor enhancer.

*Choose clean, crisp bulbs with no sign of browning.

*Foliage should be a fresh color. Refrigerate, tightly wrapped in a plastic bag, up to 5 days.

*Base and stems are rich in vitamin A and contain a fair amount of calcium, phosphorus and potassium.

LEMON GRASS

*A native of India, widely used in Thai and Vietnamese cooking, lemon grass is also used in Caribbean and many other types of Asian cooking.

*Can be used to make tea and to flavor soups and other dishes.

*Pungent herb, normally used in small amounts.

*The lemon flavor blends well with garlic, chilies, and cilantro.

*Has long, thin, gray-green leaves and scallion-like base. The blade/leaves can be sliced very fine for use. The bulb can be “bruised” and minced for use. (“Bruising” releases the flavor of the grass. Press down on the bulb end with the side of a large knife or pound lightly with a kitchen mallet.)

*Select fresh looking stalks that don’t look dry or brittle.

*Store fresh lemon grass in the refrigerator in a tightly sealed plastic bag for up to 3 weeks. Can also freeze for about 6 months without any flavor loss.

OREGANO

*Another important herb for Italian cooking, but also used in Greek and Mexican dishes.

*Add it to tomato sauces, salad dressings, tomato-based soups such as minestrone or marinades.

*Use to season baked fish, grilled poultry, mushrooms, green beans, and summer squash.

SAGE

*Most familiar as a seasoning for poultry stuffing, sage has a bold flavor and aroma.

*The narrow, oval, gray-green leaves of this pungent herb are slightly bitter and have a musty mint taste and aroma.

*Try with any type of poultry, pork, veal or ham; in cheese sauces; in legume or vegetable soups and seafood chowders; and with cooked mushrooms, lima beans, peas, tomatoes, or eggplant.

THYME

*A versatile herb, though quite strong in flavor. Compatible with many foods.

*Add a little to tomato sauce, vegetable soup, clam and other seafood chowders, beef stew or pot roast, poultry stuffing, and cooked vegetables such as summer squash and green beans.

RECIPES

Vegetable Kebabs

Makes 8 servings

- 1 small eggplant, cut in half lengthwise, then into thick chunks (peeled, if desired)
- 1 zucchini, cut in half lengthwise, then into thick chunks
- 1 yellow summer squash, cut in half lengthwise, then into thick chunks
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and cut into eighths
- 1 small red onion, sliced and cut into 8 wedges
- 2 tablespoons balsamic or red wine vinegar
- ¼ cup canola oil
- ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon minced fresh basil (or 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon dried), divided
- ¼ cup non-fat plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons non-fat mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

Thread 8 skewers, 2 skewers of each vegetable, keeping each vegetable on separate skewers. Place the vegetables in a shallow glass or plastic dish large enough to hold the skewers. Make the marinade by whisking together in a small bowl the vinegar, oil and ¼ cup of fresh basil (or 1 tablespoon dried). Pour marinade over the vegetables. Let them stand for 10 minutes, occasionally turning the skewers so the marinade coats all sides.

Meanwhile, make the dressing. Place the yogurt, mayonnaise, remaining 1 tablespoon fresh basil (or 1 teaspoon dried) and lemon juice in a blender and mix at low speed until it is smooth.

Grill the vegetables starting with the eggplant. About 5 minutes later, add the onions, and then about 5 minutes after that, add the rest of the vegetables (adjusting height of rack to avoid charring. Grill to your liking and serve with the dressing drizzled over the top.

NOTE: These kebabs can also be cooked under the oven broiler.

Per serving: 97 calories, 7 g total fat (less than 1 g saturated fat), 8 g carbohydrate, 2 g protein, 1 g dietary fiber, 39 mg sodium

Source: American Institute for Cancer Research Weekly Health-e-Recipes (www.aicr.org)

Whole Grain Salad

Makes 6 servings – 1 cup per serving

- ½ yellow or orange bell pepper cut in bite-size pieces
- ½ tomato, seeded, cut in bite-size pieces
- ½ cup radish
- 2 scallions, green and white parts, or ¼ cup chopped red or Bermuda onion
- ½ cup finely chopped dried fruit, like apricots, raisins, dates, figs or currants
- 2 tablespoons toasted pine nuts, sesame seeds, or sunflower seeds, or chopped almonds, walnuts or pecans

- 3-4 ounces diced low-fat mozzarella cheese
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste, if desired
- 3 cups cooked (and cooled) brown rice, or whole-grain pasta, or couscous, bulgur, or quinoa
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1 ½ to 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh (or 2 teaspoons dried) chives or flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped (or 2 teaspoons dried) fresh cilantro, mint or chervil

In a large bowl place the bell pepper, tomato, radish, scallions, dried fruit, nuts (or seed) and cheese. Mix lightly. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Fluff the cooled grain with a fork and season it to taste with salt and pepper. Add the rice to the bowl of salad ingredients and mix it in lightly with a fork.

In another bowl whisk together the lime juice, oil and herbs. Drizzle over the salad and mix in lightly. Serve or refrigerate, covered. Use within 2 days.

Per serving: 241 calories, 9 g total fat (2 g saturated fat), 33 g carbohydrate, 8 g protein, 3 g dietary fiber, 111 mg sodium
Source: American Institute for Cancer Research Weekly Health-e-Recipes (www.aicr.org)

Rub Combos

To add flavor to tender cuts of meat, poultry and fish without adding salt or fat, try a rub. You don't need a recipe. Just combine flavors that taste good together.

To apply the rub, gently press the mixture onto the surface of the meat prior to cooking. Flavors usually become more pronounced the longer the seasoning mixture is on the meat.

Italian Rub: Combine fresh or dried oregano, basil, and rosemary with minced Italian parsley and garlic.

Herb Rub: Combine fresh or dried marjoram, thyme, and basil.

Source: American Dietetic Association's *Complete Food and Nutrition Guide*, 1996

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914 in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Stanley R Johnson, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa

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