



INFORMATION

Harvesting And Drying Herbs

Harvesting

For most herbs, harvest leaves just as the plants are coming into bloom. At this time the leaves contain a maximum amount of the flavorful essential oils. An exception to this is mint, which should be harvested at full bloom. Harvest the herbs parsley, lovage, winter savory, and salad burnet early while leaves are still tender. Harvest early in the morning because oils evaporate in the heat of the day. For annuals, leave some leafy growth so the plant can produce new growth for a later harvest. For tender perennials (rosemary, sweet marjoram) cut a few inches off the tip of the branch to encourage new growth. Seeds can be harvested when the seed heads are dry and brown or gray and when the seeds lose their greenish color.



Drying

Air Drying

For long stem leafy herbs: The traditional way of drying these herbs is to hang bundles of branches upside down in a warm, well ventilated place. Wrapping paper around the bundle will keep dust off the drying leaves. Avoid drying the herbs in the sun - it will cause their color to fade and some of the oils to dissipate.

For short stemmed herbs: Use a drying screen for these herbs. Start by stripping off the fresh leaves and laying them on the screen. Turn periodically until completely dry.

For seeds: Cut off the seed heads and place them on drying screens. When they are dry, the seed heads must be separated from the chaff. An easy way to do this is to rub the seeds between your hands or spread the seeds in a shallow dish and gently blow on them. Dry the seed 7-10 days before storing. To protect stored seeds you can blanch them. Dip the seeds in boiling water, then dry thoroughly before storing. A disadvantage of doing this is you no longer have viable seeds to produce plants next year.

In the refrigerator:

This drying method preserves both the flavor and quality of fresh herbs. Herbs dried using this method also retain their bright green color. Place the herbs on a flat surface such as a plate or cookie sheet. Set this in your refrigerator for 2 to 3 days if the leaves are chopped, for a week or more if the leaves are whole. After the herbs are completely dry, package them in an air-tight container and store them in the freezer.

In the microwave:

Spread the herb out between two layers of paper towel. Heat on low for two minutes. If not dry, turn and heat for 1-2 more minutes. Herbs with thick leaves, such as basil and comfrey, should be air dried for three days before drying in the microwave.

After drying:

Store in an air-tight container in a cool, dry, location out of the direct sun. Avoid storing dried herbs in paper or cardboard because these materials may absorb some of the plant's oils. In a week or two, check

the stored herbs for signs of moisture. If found, the herbs are not fully dried and may begin to mold. To remedy this take the herbs out of the container and dry further.

Freezing

This is an easy way to store leafy herbs. Wash the harvested herbs and pat dry. Strip off the leaves and place them in a plastic bag. Remove the air from the bag, seal and place it in your freezer. Another way to store herbs in your freezer is to make herbal ice cubes. Simply place the herbs in the bottom of an ice cube tray, fill with water, and freeze.

Drying Methods for Various Herbs

<i>Air Dry</i>		<i>Freeze</i>
Anise seeds	Horehound	Chervil
Basil	Hyssop	Chives
Beebalm	Lemon Balm	Dill
Calendula petals	Lemon Verbena	Garlic chives
Caraway seeds	Lovage seeds and leaves	Parsley
Chamomile flowers	Marjoram	Rosemary
Chervil	Mint	
Chives	Parsley	
Cilantro seeds and leaves	Rosemary	
Fennel seeds	Saffron stigmas	
Garlic chives	Sage	
	Savory	

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