



## Preserving Herbs

Fresh herbs are one of the great gifts of summer. By growing fresh basil, dill, chives, and other flavorful herbs just outside the kitchen door, you can be deliciously creative all season long.

With a little forethought you can enjoy your herbs in the dead of winter too. Though there are no hard and fast rules about whether freezing or drying fresh herbs produces better results, there are a couple of keys to success:

- ❑ Use your herbs! Whether you choose to freeze or dry them, herbs are at their most flavorful within 6 months of picking.
- ❑ Quality in/quality out. Harvest herbs before they flower or when they are in bud for more concentrated flavor. Cut them in the morning, after the dew has dried from the leaves but before they are exposed to the hot sun.

### Freezing Herbs

In general, freezing will better preserve the flavor of herbs that have delicate flavors, or tender leaves. Examples are basil, chives, cilantro, dill, mint, and parsley.



#### Freezing Method 1:

Simply rinse your herbs, remove tender leaves from the tough stems, and let them air dry on a flat tray. When they are dry to the touch, place a bunch of leaves in a bag and freeze them. Remove them as needed, and cut them up for soups, sauces, or other uses.

#### Freezing Method 2:

Freeze larger leaves, such as large-leaf parsley or mint, individually on a flat tray (as you would blueberries), and then place the individual leaves in a bag.



#### Freezing Method 3:

Chop herbs, and pack an ice cube tray with the cut up pieces. Fill the tray with water. Once the tray is frozen you can transfer the herb-and-water cubes to a freezer bag.





#### **Freezing Method 4:**

You can also blend the herbs with oil in a food processor or blender, and then spoon the paste into an ice cube tray. This is a good way to preserve basil pesto for winter use. When the tray is frozen, place the herb cubes in a freezer bag to use one by one.

## **Drying Herbs**

Herbs such as bay leaves, lavender, oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon, and thyme hold their flavor well when dried.

#### **Drying Method 1:**

Herbs such as lavender, oregano, sage, and thyme can simply be air-dried. Pick the herbs when the leaves are dry, discarding any damaged leaves. Hang bunches of stems tied with a rubber band in a well-ventilated room, away from light. If you don't have a dark space, poke holes in a paper bag and place the bundle in it before hanging. When leaves are dry—this will take 1 to 4 weeks, depending on the plant and on the humidity—remove them from their stems and store in a jar.



#### **Drying Method 2:**

You can also create a drying rack by stretching netting or cheesecloth over a frame, and place individual sprigs or leaves on it. Place the rack in a warm, airy spot out of direct sunlight, and turn the leaves frequently. This should take two or three days.

#### **Drying Method 3:**

You can speed up the process even more by removing the best leaves from the stems and laying them out on a paper towel. Leaves should not touch. Cover this with another paper towel, and another layer of leaves. You can build up to five layers. Place the layers in a very cool oven overnight, that is, a gas oven heated only by the pilot light, or an electric oven heated only by the oven light.

