

## HERBS--HANDY HINTS

**BASIL:** Annuals-Spicy Globe, Cinnamon, Lemon, Purple Ruffles, but Sweet (Italian large-leaf Sweet) is most common. Good grown in pots because it requires moist soil and cold protection. Pick leaves when they are young, chop and freeze in ice cubes, deadhead flowers to prevent them from going to seed. Good in tomato dishes like spaghetti and tomato salads, with bland vegetables, marinades and pesto, breads, fondue and egg dishes like omelets and egg salad. Basil butter goes well with fish.

**Perennials-** African (African Blue Basil), Clove. These shrubs lack the strong flavors of the annuals, but make nice ornamentals which attract bees and other insects. No need to deadhead. The plants stay alive after setting seed.

**MINT:** Peppermints are offered in restaurants because the menthol stimulates the flow of bile to the stomach which promotes digestion. Peppermint tea eases headaches, helps relaxation, and is safe for children. Other mints do not contain menthol, but have a nice flavor-Spearmint, Kentucky Colonel Mint, Chocolate Mint, Pineapple Mint, and Mint the Best. Mideastern dishes favor strong, spicy mints like Egyptian and Moroccan, while Mexican cuisine uses Yerba Buena, California's answer to European true mints. It flavors chicken soup and albondigas while the tea soothes stomachaches and headaches.

**PARSLEY:** The two major kinds are Italian Flat Leaf and Curly Leaf. The Italian Flat Leaf has the better flavor, but restaurants garnish with Curly Leaf because it does not wilt on the plate, Parsley is a biennial which forms the leaves one year and the seed stalk the next. This mild herb is preserved best frozen, chopped in a plastic bag or added to ice cubes. When dried, it loses flavor. It is extremely versatile and can be used in soups, salads, any meats and vegetables, all egg dishes, and tartar sauce.

**ROSEMARY:** *Rosmarinus officinalis* is the historic plant while others are hybrids varying flower color, taste and growth habit from the trailing varieties cascading over walls and planters to the 7 foot high 'Tuscan Blue'. Most are flavorful-pinch and sniff a leaf. Pine-scented Rosemary is not one of the culinary choices. Gather main leaf crop before flowering. Use fresh or dry small branches, stripping off leaves just before use. It can taste "sweet" in fruit salads and cookies or "savory" in breads, biscuits, potatoes, eggplant, peas, carrots, dried bean dishes and stews and casseroles.

**BAY:** Add to soups, stews, and tomato sauce, but remove sharp leaves before serving. When a leaf is placed in a canister of flour, it serves as a natural insect repellent. Mediterranean or Sweet Bay (*Laurus nobilis*) should not be confused with California Bay (*Umbellularia californica*), also called Oregon Myrtle, which has a musky, spicy scent and used in American Indian and Creole cooking.

**THYME:** *Thymus vulgaris* is the original thyme from the Mediterranean region, but hybrids include Lemon, Orange, Caraway, Silver and Creeping. Pick leaves in summer when thyme is in bloom. It is known as the "blending herb" because it pulls the flavors together in meats, butters, cheeses, eggs, soups, salads and vegetables.

**MARIORAM and OREGANO:** First cousins in the mint family. Marjoram is sweeter than oregano and goes best with milder vegetables-carrots, peas, spinach, green beans, while oregano enhances the stronger vegetables like cabbage, broccoli, onions, beans, and tomato sauce. Both go well with omelets, cheeses, herbal butter, and vinegar. Add near the end of cooking. MEXICAN OREGANO (*Lippia graveolens*, verbena family) is not a true oregano, but used as an equivalent in Mexican cooking.

**SAGE:** There are more than 900 species of sage with the common culinary ones being Holt's Mammoth, 'Icterina', Tricolor, Golden, Greek, and Garden. They often have large fleshy leaves. Add sage sparingly to strong vegetables, breads, stuffing, cheeses. It aids the digestion of fatty meats. Pineapple Sage leaves and red tubular flowers go well in fruit salads. Cleveland Sage, the California native, is culinary.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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