

# Harvesting and Using Herbs

Dr. Leigh Whittinghill, Assistant Professor of Urban Agriculture

Most herbs can be used fresh in a variety of cooking dishes. The best time to harvest herbs depends on the type and planned use (please see table). Leaves harvested in the morning are best. Generally, cut no more than one-third of the stem's length during the summer. To prevent flowering, pinch off buds as they appear. Fresh herbs can be left on their stems for cooking if they will be removed before serving. Otherwise, remove leaves from stems before cooking.



All Season	Before Flowering	During Flowering
Borage	Anise, <i>leaves</i>	Catnip
Caraway, <i>leaves</i>	Basil	Chamomile
Chives	Betony	Saffron
Clary	Chervil	
Dill, <i>fresh leaves</i>	Cilantro	
Lemon Balm, <i>fresh</i>	Dill, <i>leaves for drying</i>	
Lemongrass	Fennel, <i>leaves</i>	
Lemon Verbena	Hyssop	
Lovage, <i>fresh</i>	Lemon Balm, <i>for drying</i>	<b>As Seed</b>
Marjoram, <i>fresh</i>	Lovage, <i>for drying</i>	Anise
Mint	Marjoram, <i>for drying</i>	Coriander
Oregano, <i>fresh</i>	Oregano, <i>for drying</i>	Caraway
Rosemary	Parsley	Dill
Sage, <i>fresh</i>	Rue	Fennel
Summer Savory, <i>fresh</i>	Sage, <i>for drying</i>	
Thyme	Summer Savory, <i>for drying</i>	
Tarragon	Thyme	

## Caring for Your Herbs

- Tie 10 to 15 stems together in bunches and hang them in a warm, airy place to dry for up to 3 weeks.
- Leaves should feel crisp and crackly to the touch when dry.
- Dry leaves should be stored whole in air tight glass or ceramic containers.
- Dried herbs are best if used within the first year after harvesting.



## Other Methods of Preserving Herbs

### FREEZING:

- Basil, chervil, chives, cilantro, fennel, lovage and parsley retain more flavor if frozen and not dried.
- Place leaves on a cookie sheet in the freezer, then transfer to a bag when frozen or freeze into ice if they will be used in soups, stews or sauces.
- Basil and lovage must be blanched, so put leaves in an ice cube tray and pour boiling water over them to fill the tray. As the water cools, it blanches them.
- Basil, cilantro and lovage can also be frozen in oil without blanching.



### FLAVORED OILS:

- Basil, chervil, chives, coriander, dill, fennel, lemon verbena, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, tarragon and thyme can be used to make flavored oils.
- Cover herbs in oil and store in the refrigerator.
- Use within three weeks or freeze.
- If including vegetables such as garlic or chili peppers, soak in vinegar for 8 to 24 hours before use. This stops bacterial growth, including *Clostridium botulinum*, which causes botulism.



### FLAVORED VINEGARS:

- Chop or bruise herbs and place in a glass container.
- Heat vinegar (warm but not boiling) in a glass or stainless steel saucepan and pour over herbs.
- Cover vinegar herb mix with glass or plastic lids. The vinegar will cause metal lids to corrode.
- Suggested herb combinations for flavored vinegars include chive flowers and savory; and parsley, rosemary and sage.



## References

- Mayer, Joachim. 2002. Container Plants for Beginners. Barron's. Hauppauge, New York.
- McVicar, Jekka. 2008. The Complete Herb Book. Firefly Books, Inc. Buffalo, New York.
- Smith, Miranda. 1997. Your Backyard Herb Garden. Rodale Press, Inc. Emmaus, Pennsylvania