



## Making Herb Blends



One of the many rewards of herb gardening is using the harvest later in the year in cooking or for decorating your house, bringing the scents, colours, and textures of your herb garden indoors. When the snow or sleet/rain is falling during the winter months, potpourri you've blended from leaves and favourite flowers will recall the scent and beauty of your summer garden. Hopefully, you've already harvested your fresh herb garden and have small bunches of herbs drying throughout the house. If you didn't, you can purchase fresh herbs at the supermarket to dry,

gathering them into small bunches and tying the ends together with string or raffia. Hang these small bunches upside down and far enough apart so air will circulate between them. If you have a beamed ceiling, hang the herbs there, or use the ceiling of a well-ventilated basement attic, old barn, or drying shed. Just keep the herbs away from the kitchen stove, sink, or fireplace.

You can also make herb blends with dried herbs purchased in jars.

Gourmet shops are full of bottles and jars of dried herb blends -- Tex-Mex blends, herbs for poultry stuffing, Cajun mixed, *fines herbes*, *bouquet garni*, *herbes de Province*--the list goes on and on. Since dried herbs only hold their peak flavour for six months to a year, now's a good time to dump any old blends and prepare several new combinations for cooking during the winter months. Don't throw away the bottles as you'll want to recycle them with the new blends.

When experimenting with herb blends, remember to be a little stingy; it's easier to add more of a strong herb than to take some out. Store dried herbs in airtight containers away from strong sunlight; they'll keep for six months to a year. Combine herbs that you like best and think will taste good together. Usually, combination of two or three herbs provides sufficient balance without the herb flavours clashing.

Use home-made blends within 4 to 6 months for best flavour. When you use the blends, crush or bruise the herbs with your fingers to release their volatile oils. Here are some interesting blends.

### Texas Seasoning

This is excellent on grilled meats, seafood, poultry and game, or vegetables. Sprinkle onto roasted baby new potatoes and toss with butter. Use in dip with sour cream or plain non-fat yogurt.

- 3 tablespoons dried cilantro
- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 4 teaspoons dried thyme
- 2 tablespoons pure good-quality chilli powder
- 2 tablespoons freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin

2 small dried chilli peppers, crushed  
1 teaspoon dried garlic

Combine all ingredients in a blender or food processor. Grind to desired consistency. Store in a glass jar, tightly covered, at room temperature.

### **Country Blend**

Perfect for salads, soups, on steamed vegetables, and blended into butter for bread and biscuits. This blend makes a terrific substitute for table salt. Spoon onto hot baked potatoes; forget the butter and salt.

5 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme or 5 teaspoons dried  
4 tablespoons chopped fresh basil or 4 teaspoons dried  
4 tablespoons chopped fresh chervil or 4 teaspoons dried  
4 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon or 4 teaspoons (20 ml) dried

Combine the herbs and store in an airtight container at room temperature.

### **Fish and Seafood Herbs**

Sprinkle onto fish or seafood before baking or grilling. Add the blend to fish soup and sauce; use for making court bouillon for poaching fish and shellfish.

5 teaspoons dried basil  
5 teaspoons crushed fennel seed  
4 teaspoons dried parsley  
1 teaspoon dried lemon peel

Combine all herbs and store in a tightly closed glass jar at room temperature.

### **Pasta Blend**

Excellent tossed with pasta and a little olive oil. Stir into pasta sauces; mix with chopped carrots, garlic, and tomatoes for a super stuffing for fish or flank steak.

5 tablespoons dried basil  
3 tablespoons dried oregano  
2 tablespoons dried thyme  
1 teaspoon dried garlic

Combine all ingredients and store in an airtight container at room temperature.

### **Stuffing Blend**

A basic herb mixture when making stuffing for turkey, chicken, game hens, or whole fish, this blend can be stirred into unsalted butter to use as a sauce for grilled fish or steamed vegetables.

6 tablespoons dried rubbed sage  
3 tablespoons dried sweet marjoram

2 tablespoons dried parsley  
4 teaspoons dried celery flakes

Combine all herbs and store in an airtight container at room temperature.

### **Herbes de Provence**

Use in omelettes; stir into rice and grains. Sprinkle lightly on meat, fish, or poultry before grilling. Whisk into vinegar and oil and a smidgen of Dijon mustard for a sprightly vinaigrette.

4 teaspoons dried oregano  
2 teaspoons dried basil  
2 teaspoons dried sweet marjoram  
2 teaspoons dried thyme  
1 teaspoon dried mint  
1 teaspoon dried rosemary  
1 teaspoon dried sage leaves  
1 teaspoon fennel seed  
1 teaspoon dried lavender (optional)

In a food processor or blender, pulse the herbs to desired consistency. Store in an airtight container and use within 3 months.

### **Cajun Blend**

This is excellent with fish or poultry. Sprinkle it into a baked sweet potato or over steamed vegetables.

2 tablespoons paprika  
1 1/2 tablespoons garlic powder  
1 tablespoon onion powder  
1/2 tablespoon black pepper  
2 teaspoons cayenne pepper  
2 teaspoons dried oregano  
2 teaspoons dried thyme

Combine the herbs and spices and store in an airtight container at room temperature.

### **Fines Herbes**

You may season fish or poultry before cooking with this blend. Use in omelettes and scrambled egg substitute. Sprinkle over hot vegetables.

3 tablespoons dried parsley  
2 teaspoons dried chervil  
2 teaspoons dried chives  
1 1/2 teaspoons dried tarragon

Combine the herbs and store in a tightly covered jar at room temperature.

### **Barbecue Blend #1**

This is an excellent choice for beef, lamb, or pork. Sprinkle over eggplant or zucchini before grilling.

- 3 tablespoons dried basil
- 3 tablespoons dried oregano
- 2 bay leaves, finely crumbled
- 2 tablespoons dried rosemary
- 1 tablespoon dried savory

Combine the herbs. Stir in a tightly covered container at room temperature.

### **Barbecue Blend #2**

Perfect for fish and poultry; sprinkle onto tomatoes before roasting. Add to salad dressings made with olive oil and balsamic or red wine vinegar.

- 4 tablespoons dried basil
- 4 tablespoons dried rubbed sage
- 4 tablespoons dried thyme
- 4 teaspoons cracked black pepper
- 4 teaspoons dried savory
- 1 teaspoon dried lemon peel

In a spice grinder or blender, whirl the herbs until coarsely ground and store in an airtight jar at room temperature.