



Incorporating Herbs in Your Everyday Diet

Practical Tips & Tools

Herbs are a great way to infuse the everyday diet with flavor, health benefits, and nutrition. If you are new to herbs, this article will help you to get started by explaining a few herb basics.

In botany, an herb is described as a herbaceous plant that lacks a woody stem and dies to the ground each winter. Herbs are also the part of the plant that is used to flavor food or produces fragrance. The term herb is often used interchangeably with the word "spices". However, the terms differ. Spices come from roots, flowers, fruits, seeds, or bark, often from warm and tropical climates. While they can have an herbaceous nature, spices take on different culinary profiles.

Getting started with herbs is easy. Here are a few beginner tips to try or save for later:

1. **Growing:** Herbs are great for beginner gardeners. Many herbs grow easily in containers, small spaces or can make great additions to a flowerbed. Choose and group herbs based on the amount of light, space, and water needed. For a simple guide to choosing the best herbs for a garden, check out [this great guide](#) from our colleagues at Cooperative Extension in Forsyth County.

2. **Harvesting:** Harvest herbs when the plant has enough foliage to maintain growth. Remember, up to 75% of the plant's growth can be harvested at one time. Harvest herbs before flowering occur for optimal taste. Consider allowing herbs to produce seeds and save them for the next season. We welcome questions about plants and gardening at [our local Extension](#) offices.
3. **Cooking:** Explore herbs as an alternative to salt or other sodium-based commercial seasonings. Herbs present many culinary flavor profiles, including savory, sweet, spicy, bitter, sour, and more. Learning which herbs pair best with a dish is challenged. The [Quick Flavoring Guide](#) offers suggestions to explore new herbs and spices. Did you know that dried herbs are usually 3 to 4 times stronger than fresh herbs?

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4. **Preserving:** One of the best ways to enjoy herbs through all seasons is preserving. The most traditional form of preservation is drying, which is achieved by air-drying, oven-drying, or using a dehydrator. The National Center for Home Food Preservation provides excellent tips on [ways to preserve herbs](#). When growing herbs at home, remember that the best time to harvest herbs for drying is in the budding stage. Harvest just before the flowers began to open.

Did you find these tips helpful? Let us know how you are incorporating herbs into your everyday diet on our Facebook page at [Facebook.com/mecklenburgces](https://www.facebook.com/mecklenburgces)!