



Herbalicious!

When seeking inspiration, some of the best cooks simply step out into the garden. Clipping fresh herbs moments before adding them to a dish is satisfying both as a gardener and a chef. The piney flavor of rosemary and the bright citrus essence of lemon grass give taste buds something to talk about. When a recipe needs a little boost to make it worthy of praise, fresh herbs are often the answer.

Even a general knowledge of herbs can make a dramatic difference in the kitchen. Dill is known for enhancing seafood dishes with its mild licorice flavor. With a slightly woody flavor, thyme lends a hint of earthiness to the palate. Parsley is one of the most common herbs, thanks to the out-of-date practice of being used as confetti-like garnish on restaurant plates. Refreshing mint isn't just for dessert; it's wonderful on lamb and mixed with fresh greens for salads. Oregano is slightly spicy and loved for its addition to tomato sauces while cilantro is an extreme flavor that is loved or hated. (Those who dislike the parsley-like herb often describe it as soapy-tasting and some believe that an extreme distaste for the herb is hereditary.)

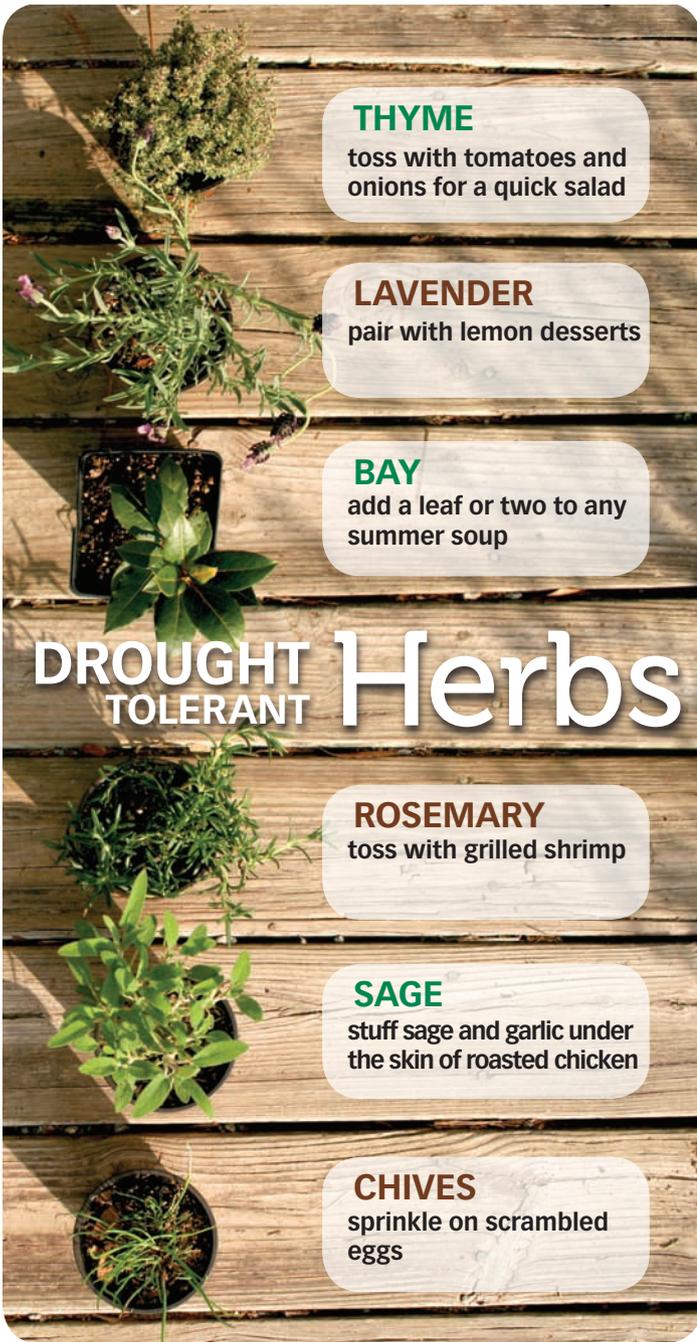
At one time, home cooks were limited to dried and bottled herbs from brands like McCormick available at supermarkets.

Summer brings the essence of herbs from the garden into the kitchen

Thyme came as a powder and sage was only rubbed, unlike the fresh selection in the produce department today. After the fresh herb boom in the 1990s, little plastic pots of these tasty plants became readily available at a variety of retailers. Now, one plant costs about the same as one package containing a few sprigs at the grocery store. Select the herbs you can't live without and make a home for them in your garden (see sidebar for drought-tolerant options).

A little bit of most herbs goes a long way. Too much tarragon can be a horrible taste experience whereas using just enough gives a pleasant flavor of anise. Add herbs in small amounts and use it as an excuse to taste often. Use the leaves of the herbs and discard the stems, unless using as a garnish. Many herbs have exciting new hybrids that open up flavor possibilities: try lemon or lime thyme, pineapple mint, chocolate mint, variegated sage, or Thai basil in place of the herbs that you've grown to love.

By Rebecca Lang | Photos by Katie Davis | shot on location at [Thyme After Thyme](#)



THYME

toss with tomatoes and onions for a quick salad

LAVENDER

pair with lemon desserts

BAY

add a leaf or two to any summer soup

DROUGHT TOLERANT Herbs

ROSEMARY

toss with grilled shrimp

SAGE

stuff sage and garlic under the skin of roasted chicken

CHIVES

sprinkle on scrambled eggs

Storing Fresh Herbs

To get the most shelf-life out of fresh herbs, store them in the refrigerator with the stems in water, just like you would with fresh-cut flowers. To create a greenhouse effect, cover the herb-filled glass with a large zip-top plastic bag. The zipper part of the bag will remain open at the bottom of the glass.

NEW POTATO SALAD WITH DILL

- 1½ pounds new potatoes
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ tablespoon lemon juice
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped dill

1. In a stockpot, cover potatoes with water and bring to a boil. Boil for 10 minutes or until tender when tested with a fork.
2. Whisk together vinegar and next five ingredients. While whisking, slowly pour olive oil into vinegar mixture.
3. Drain potatoes using a colander and place in a large serving bowl. Add dressing and toss lightly, being careful not to smash potatoes. Add dill.

YIELD: Serves 6.

SEARED SALMON WITH TARRAGON LEMON AIOLI

- 6 (6-ounce) center-cut salmon fillets with skin attached
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

1. Using paper towels, pat salmon dry and season with salt and pepper.
2. In a large nonstick skillet, heat oil over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking. Increase heat to high and place salmon in skillet, skin side up, until well browned, about 4 minutes.
3. Turn fish and sear until just cooked through, about 4 more minutes.
4. Serve with Tarragon Lemon Aioli.

YIELD: Serves 6.

Tarragon Lemon Aioli
 2 garlic cloves, finely minced
 ½ cup mayonnaise
 1 tablespoon finely chopped tarragon
 2 tablespoons lemon juice
 Combine garlic, mayonnaise, tarragon, and lemon juice. Serve with salmon.

YIELD: Makes ½ cup.

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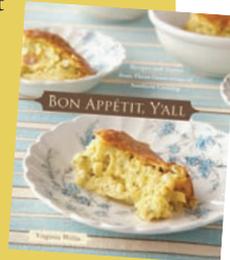


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Rebecca Recommends

Can't get enough Southern cooking? Pick up a copy of Virginia Willis' new book, *Bon Appétit, Y'all* to round out any cookbook library. Virginia trained in France after learning each and every strand in the culinary rope of the South. She blends the two types of cuisine by using classical French techniques to create the best home cooking you've had in years.



SWEET POTATO BISCUITS

- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 cup cooked mashed sweet potato, cooled
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup cold salted butter, cut into pieces
- 2 tablespoons fresh rosemary, finely chopped

Butter, softened, to serve

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2. Stir together buttermilk and sweet potato. Set aside.
3. Using a whisk, combine flour, baking powder, and salt. Cut in butter until size of very small peas. Pour buttermilk mixture into flour. Add rosemary. Stir until all of flour is moistened.
4. Turn dough onto floured surface and knead dough 5 times. Using hands, pat dough until $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thick.
5. Cut biscuits with a 3-inch round cutter. Place biscuits, touching each other on a lightly greased baking sheet or Silpat (silicone baking mat).
6. Bake for 12 minutes or until just slightly browned. Serve warm with butter.

YIELD: Makes about 12 biscuits. ★