

Making herb butters, infused oils and vinegars

Making the ordinary extraordinary

Professional chefs often add butter or oil to enhance the flavor of cooked vegetables, salads, meats and fish. Unfortunately, adding fat increases calories. However, adding flavorful herbs to butter or oils can help you use less fat and still achieve the desired taste enhancement.

Making herb butter

To get the best flavor, pick herbs in mid-morning after the dew has dried from the leaves and before the heat of the day. Wash the leaves thoroughly and pat dry.

- Mix softened, room temperature butter with chopped herb leaves and mix in a food processor or blender. Use 2 to 4 tbsps. of finely-chopped herbs for 8 oz. of butter.
- Add a small amount of lemon juice, lemon zest or cream cheese (optional)
- Roll the butter into a log and cover with plastic wrap.
- Refrigerate for several hours or overnight to allow flavors to merge.
- Freeze or store in the refrigerator for up to four days. (University of Alabama Extension Service, Farmers' Bulletin No. 1977 U.S. Department of Agriculture).

Herbs often used to make butter include: basil, chives, dill, oregano, parsley, rosemary, tarragon, thyme.

Herb vinegars

Not only are herb vinegars a tasty addition to homemade salad dressing or to add a sprinkle of flavor to vegetables, they can be attractively packaged for holiday gifts.

To make herb vinegar:

1. Gently rinse herbs and shake off excess water. Then place on a paper towel and allow the herb to dry. NOTE: it is essential that the herb be completely dry to avoid clouding.
2. Remove any damaged leaves.
3. Again gently, squeeze or rub the leaves to release the volatile oil that flavors the vinegar.
4. If you want additional flavors in your herb vinegar, you may select garlic, ginger or hot peppers. This is optional.
5. Add herbs and supplemental ingredients into a clean jar. It is customary to use a canning jar or gallon glass container—saving the pretty jars for final storage.
6. Pour a high-quality vinegar over the herbs and stir gently with the back of a wooden spoon.
7. Cover the jar with plastic wrap or lid.
8. Store in a cool, dry location for 2–4 weeks.
9. Strain vinegar and pour into pretty container. If desired, you can add a fresh spring of herb to the container for decoration.



Photo credit: Herbal Gardens

Herb infused oils

The essential oils in herbs can be extracted and blended with culinary oils to create flavored salad dressings, dipping sauces, marinades and tasty

accents for vegetable and pasta dishes. All you need are fresh herbs, a cooking oil - usually olive oil - a container and a bit of time.

CAUTION: The low-acid environment of herb infused oils has the potential to support the growth of botulism toxins leading to serious illness. To minimize the risk either acidify the ingredients before adding them to the oil or store the infusion in the refrigerator and consume it within 2–3 days.

Preparation

Herbs commonly used to create infused oils are basil, oregano, thyme and rosemary. Garlic or citrus zest may be added to enhance the flavor complexity.

Gently wash the ingredients. Dry thoroughly-preferably overnight. Although bacteria can't grow in the oil itself, it can grow in the water left on the other ingredients.

The Pacific Northwest Extension Service recommends acidifying herbs or other ingredients using citric acid before making the infusion. To acidify herbs use:

- 2 cups water
- 1 tablespoon citric acid
- 1 ½ cups fresh herbs

Dissolve citric acid completely in the water. Rinse the herbs and pat dry. Place the herbs in the acid solution and allow to sit at room temperature for 24 hours. Remove the herbs and pat dry.

Making your herb oil infusion

The ratio of herbs to oil is 1:10. Adding more herb material will increase the flavor. Olive oil is the most common oil chosen for infusion. However, for a milder oil flavor canola oil may be used.

“The University of Idaho had success infusing oils at room temperature (about 70 °F) for 1 to 10 days with the intensity of flavor increasing over time. For quicker results, oils may be heated. Successful infusions were created at a temperature of 140 °F

for 5 minutes. Exceeding a temperature of 140 °F is not recommended because higher heats will damage oil flavor. The flavor of oil infusions will continue to intensify as long as herbs and garlic are left in the oil.” (Clemson University Extension Service)

Using herb-infused oils

- Remove herbs and other flavorings from oil. Place oil in a labeled, dark-glass container.
- Keep flavored oils refrigerated. Infused oils last about 1 month when stored properly as long as the ingredients were acidified before infusion.
- Allow flavored oils to sit out at room temperature for approximately 20 minutes before each use.
- Don't use flavored oils for deep-frying.

More information

Flavored Vinegars and Oils

<http://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/nutrition-food-safety-health/flavored-vinegars-and-oils-9-340/>

Making Garlic- and Herb-Infused Oils At Home

<http://extension.uidaho.edu/owyhee/files/2013/10/PNW664-Making-Garlic-and-Herb-Infused-Oils-at-Home.pdf>

Infusing Oils with Garlic, Basil, Oregano or

Rosemary http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/hot_topics/2015/01%20infusing_oils_with_garlic_basil_oregano_or_rosemary.html



Photo: RecipesHub