

Notes for the October 21st Hamilton-Wenham Garden Club program **Preserving the Summer Bounty**

By Karen O'Brien of The Green Woman's Garden

There exists a quantity of pleasures to be encountered by using herbs in your everyday life. The aroma, taste and visual delight of herbs can elevate your cuisine and bottle up a little bit of summer to help brighten a winter day. Using fresh herbs (either grown in your garden or on a windowsill) ensures that you not only enjoy the product of your labors, but a sensory experience as you create them.

Chopping, crushing or otherwise preparing fresh herbs releases their essential oils and can bring back the scents of summer.



Drying Herbs

Drying herbs is one of the easiest methods of preserving them. However, many herbs do not dry well. Herbs like tarragon, basil, and chervil do not retain their flavors when dried. Mints, lavender, savory, marjoram, parsley, sage, dill, and thyme do dry beautifully. Care needs to be taken that the herbs are dried quickly and without sun. This preserves their color and flavor best. An attic is a perfect place for drying herbs; merely gather small bunches and secure with an elastic and hang from the rafters. Alternatively, you can use old screens and spread the herbs out on them. A car trunk can work in a pinch – you know how hot that gets in the summer!

Herbes de Provence

Using dried herbs, blend:

3 tbs. sweet marjoram 3 tbs. summer savory 2 tbs. thyme 2 tbs. rosemary 1 tbs. lavender 1 tsp. sage

Keep in a tightly sealed jar out of heat and humidity. Excellent on chicken, lamb, and fish.

Freezing Herbs

Those herbs that do not dry well can often be frozen. Chop the herbs, and put in ice cube trays. Add water or olive oil, depending on which way you plan on using them. Freeze, then put the cubes in plastic freezer bags or other containers and label them! You won't remember which is which unless you do. These can be added to soups, stews, sauces, sautes, or any recipe calling for fresh herbs. Tarragon, rosemary, and lemon verbena do well frozen.

Floral ice wreath for a punch bowl

In a bundt pan, layer lemon verbena leaves, anise hyssop flowers, and lavender flowers (full spikes). Fill pan one third with either water or the base ingredient for your punch – such as tea, lemonade, juice, etc. Freeze until solid, then add another one third more liquid. Freeze again. Float in your punch bowl. For an even more festive look, add edible flowers such as Johnny jump-ups, rosebuds or pinks.

Herb Pastes

Another way I like to keep herbs on hand is to make herb pastes. Take your herbs and put them in a food processor or blender with a little olive oil. Pulse gently to mix, adding oil as needed. Herb pastes can then be frozen. I use snack size plastic bags, placing about 3-4 tablespoons in each, then flattening them to fill the bag. Squeeze out as much air as you can (I use a straw) and freeze. You can chip off as much as you need throughout the year. Garlic scapes, lemon grass, chiles, basil, dill, and cilantro are all good candidates for this method.

Herb Butters

Herb butters are another way to use your excess herbs, and fun to make, as well. You can take any combination of herbs, spices, fruit and/or nuts, and create a luscious spread that will keep for some time. I only use unsalted butter, as I do not like the taste of salt and feels it interferes with the delicate flavors of the herbs. The herbs can be either fresh or dried, just remember that you need to use three times as much fresh herb when adjusting recipes.

Dill and Parsley Herb Butter

1 stick unsalted butter 1 tbsp. finely minced parsley leaves 2 tbsp. fresh chopped dill leaves

Soften butter in small bowl. Add herbs and mix well, incorporating with a spatula or wooden spoon. Transfer blended butter to plastic wrap and roll into a log shape. Can be frozen.

Lime Rosemary

½ cup unsalted butter Zest of one lime 2 tbsp. raspberry preserves (seedless)
1 tsp. fresh rosemary, finely chopped

Soften butter to room temperature. Add other ingredients and mix well.

Herb Syrups

Taking fresh herbs and making a tea with them, then adding sugar, can be a great way to use sweet herbs, such as mint, bay, lavender, Thai or other flavored basil, anise hyssop, and others. They can be used for flavoring drinks, as a marinade for fruit, or to sweeten tea. These can be frozen in small containers, or even ice cube trays, for use all year long.

Lavender Lemonade

Take a large handful of dried lavender flowers and place them in a heatproof bowl. Boil water and add enough to cover the lavender. Steep for 15-20 minutes. Strain out the lavender, and measure the water. Measure out an amount of sugar equal to the water. Pour water and sugar into saucepan, and heat until sugar is dissolved. Add lemon juice – about ½ cup to 1 cup of syrup. Mix with one quart of cold water. Alternatively, you can make the lavender tea and add it to ready made lemonade.

Herbal Vinegars

This is a fun way to let your imagination soar. All kinds of combinations are possible, or you can make straight one herb vinegar. I like dill and tarragon vinegar to keep on hand as I use these often. However, I also make fruit and herb vinegars that can be either sweet or savory. Use a good quality white wine or balsamic vinegar, or apple cider vinegar. White wine vinegar is good for more delicate herbs.

Herb Combinations for Vinegars

Fennel, Tarragon, and Lemon Verbena	Thai Basil, Ginger, and Lemon Grass
Lavender and Blackberry (or Black Raspberry)	Oregano, Basil, Parsley, and Garlic Chives
Rose Petal, Rose Geranium, and Red Raspberry	Dill weed, Dill seeds, and Chives
Lemon Balm, Lemon Grass, and Lemon Verbena	Purple Basil, Lemon Balm, and Green Basil

Fire Cider

A popular mixture of herbs steeped in vinegar is a sort of cure-all – and acts as to keep one healthy by ingesting a shot glass each day, particularly in the winter months. It is called Fire Cider, and is made with ground horseradish, lots of garlic, onions, ginger, and chile peppers. I make mine with turmeric, which is a good anti-inflammatory. Some add honey to the mixture, as this is indeed powerful “medicine” and very strong.

Herb Sugar and Herb Salts

There are a couple of ways to create an herbal salt or sugar blend. Coarse salt is one choice, as it absorbs more flavor and you generally need less of it for seasoning. Place an amount of salt in a small bowl, adding the fresh herbs of your choice. Using a pestle or other type of masher, crush the herbs against the grains of salt, until they are well mixed. Spread the salt mix on a jelly roll pan, and heat gently in a very low oven (200 degrees) for one hour. Break up any clumps that remain, and store the dried salt in glass jars. Another easy way to prepare a salt blend is to layer the salt and herbs in a small jar. Pour some salt into a wide mouthed jar, layer with fresh herbs, add another layer of salt, another of herbs, etc. until the jar is full. Let sit for a couple of weeks until the herbs have released their oils and are dry. You can then stir the herbs into the salt, crushing them finely and breaking up any large clumps. Store in a glass container.

Sugars can be made in much the same way. Take the herbs and crush them in a mortar and pestle, adding sugar as you do. This will result in a moist mixture that will keep a long time. It is better suited to herbs that are delicate in color, such as rose petals or lavender flowers. Or, you can layer the herbs with sugar, filling a small jar with a sweet delight.

Peppermint Rose Sugar

Place 6-7 large peppermint rose geranium leaves in 2 c. sugar. Let stand for a few days. Remove the leaves before using.

Rose Sugar

Use a mortar and pestle to grind fragrant rose petals with sugar. The result is a long lasting mix that will keep the scent of the rose. It can be mixed with cream cheese for a delightful spread or filling for tarts, etc.

Peppermint Rose Sugar Cookie Recipe

3 c. all-purpose flour, sifted	1 c. butter
1 ½ tsp. baking powder	2 large eggs
½ tsp. salt	1 tsp. rosewater
1 ¼ c. peppermint rose sugar	

Sift all dry ingredients except ¼ c. peppermint rose sugar. Add butter until mixture is crumbly. Stir in beaten egg and vanilla. On a floured surface, roll dough onto a floured surface to 1/8 inch. Cut into shapes and sprinkle with reserved sugar. Place on an ungreased baking sheet and bake for 6 - 8 minutes, in a preheated 400°F oven.

If you have an abundance of small rose geranium leaves, you can press a leaf into each cookie before baking.

Herb Liqueurs

There are lots of books and information on the internet on making herb liqueurs or cordials. Usually, you mix vodka or another alcohol with the herbs, macerate for a time, then strain out the plant material and sweeten with a sugar syrup. It is important to then let the mixture smooth for a time before consuming.

Seven Seed Liqueur

Grind together one teaspoon each of the following seeds: allspice, cumin, anise, dill, caraway, fennel, and coriander.

If you have a spare coffee bean grinder, it is a snap to grind the seeds. Otherwise, use a ceramic or marble mortar and pestle. Add seeds to four cups of vodka (I used 100 proof which is a little stronger). Let steep for four weeks, then strain. Add one cup of sugar syrup (two parts sugar to one part water). Let stand for another couple of weeks before using.

Herb Cordial (from Kitchen Cordials, by Nancy Crosby and Sue Kenny)

½ cup honey	¼ tsp. cloves	7 cardamom pods, crushed	Peel of ½ lemon & ½ orange
1 cup sugar	2 sticks cinnamon	3 whole allspice	1 whole nutmeg, broken
½ cup water	½ vanilla bean, broken	¼ tsp. caraway seeds	2 ½ cups 100 proof vodka

Simmer all ingredients except vodka for 15 minutes. Cool. Pour into glass container along with vodka. Let stand three weeks. Strain. (Note: Though the directions don't call for this, let the cordial mellow for a few more weeks after straining).

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Green Cleaning Products

Soft Scrub Cleanser

1/4 c. borax 1/8 c. baking soda 1-2 tbsp. castile soap
enough water to make a creamy consistency few drops of essential oil – your choice

Combine all ingredients. Use a small amount on a wetted sponge or cleaning cloth. Good for bathroom, tile, counters.

Green all-purpose spray

2 c. water 1/2 c. distilled white vinegar 1 tsp. pure castile soap
3/4 c. hydrogen peroxide 20 drops tea tree oil 20 drops essential oil – your choice

Fill spray bottle with ingredients. Suitable for acrylic, ceramic tile, wood, marble and granite.

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Herbal Body Products

Lavender-Lemon Salt Scrub

1/8 cup of epsom salts 1 tsp. lavender flowers 1-2 drops lemon oil
2 tsp. sweet almond oil 1-2 drops lavender oil

In small bowl, mix together epsom salts and lavender flowers. Add almond oil, then essential oils and blend well.

Hand Sanitizer

2 tbsp. aloe vera gel 1/4 cup 99% rubbing alcohol 3 drops each rosemary, tea tree, and eucalyptus oils

Mix ingredients in small pump bottle. Use a quarter size dollop and rub hand together. Wipe off any extra.

