

Jen's Personal Chef Service

Dining experiences created exclusively for you!

Virginia Beach, Virginia

Drying Herbs

Air drying allows moisture to slowly evaporate and also leave the oils in the leaf, leaving the source of the flavor intact. You can flat dry herbs by de-stemming the leaves and placing them on a cookie sheet or baking dish. If you have a wire cooling rack that you can place on a cookie sheet that would be ideal for drying your herbs. Lay the leaves flat on the sheet or the rack. Rotate leaves periodically to help the herbs dry completely. This process will take about a week or so.

You can also take a branch of rosemary, bay or other herbs that can be harvested in branches and hang them in a cool, dry and dark place until they are dried. This will take a bit more time (up to two weeks) but you can dry a lot more product at one time.

The microwave is a fast way to dry herbs and can be used if you don't have place to let your herbs air dry. This is not the best method as you do cook the herbs a bit while you are drying them and that will cause them to lose some of their potency. Place herbs on a microwave safe plate lined with a paper towel; cover with another paper towel. Microwave in 30 second intervals until the herbs are dry. You should watch the herbs carefully as they can burn.

Once dry, you can crush or leave them whole. Place in an airtight container, use empty, washed and fully dried spice jars, if you have them, or place in zip top baggie and remove any excess air.

These methods work the best for herbs with a low moisture content dry. Use these methods for herbs such as bay, rosemary, dill or oregano.

Remember that dried herbs are stronger than fresh so you'll need to use about 1 teaspoon as a substitute for 1 tablespoon fresh herbs.

Freezing Herbs

You may also freeze herbs. You can freeze herbs two different ways depending upon the type of herb.

For more hearty leaves like rosemary or bay leaves, you can place them in a single layer on a cookie sheet and freeze until they are frozen solid. Be sure to remove them from the stem before placing them on the cookie sheet. Once frozen you can place in a small freezer bag and return the freezer until you need them. Freeze dried herbs can be substituted like dried herbs above.

For more delicate herbs like basil, mince them up and place herbs in an ice cube tray. Add water to fill the cups, leaving a little room at the top. I keep a couple of ice cube trays on hand specifically dedicated to freezing herbs. Place in the freezer, once the herbs are mostly frozen, add a little more water to the top so that any herbs that were sticking out of the water get covered. Freeze solid. Remove cubes from tray and place in a freezer bag until you need them. Be sure to adjust the liquid in your recipe if necessary to account for the water added to the herbs. Herb cubes are great for using in soups, spaghetti sauces and sauces.

The freezing in water method works better for herbs that are more delicate and have high water content such as basil, mint or tarragon. In this case, you are not drying the herb so use about the same amount of frozen as you would fresh herbs.

Other Ideas for Saving Herbs

You can also mince herbs such as parsley, basil, tarragon or oregano and place in a small contain and cover with olive oil until covered. If you store in the refrigerator until you need it, you have wonderfully flavored herb oil to use in your recipes. This technique can also be used for garlic.