

Living Healthy with Herbs

By Denine Rogers, RDN, LD, FAND



I always love to try new dishes when I cook my meals particularly when I add my herbs. Recently, I was reading that herbs not only excellent for culinary usage but they also have been known to have healing properties. There are five herbs and spices that I love to cook with that have incredible healing properties.



Photo by Denine Rogers, RDN, LD, FAND

Basil - (Ocimum basilium)

Have you ever experienced an upset stomach and felt a little gassy? The next time you feel this way you may want to treat these with ailments the same basil you use in your tomato sauce. Basil has been associated with the sign of love in Italy. According to tradition, when a lady puts a pot of basil on the balcony outside her room, it means she is ready to receive a suitor. Nowadays, there are so many pots of basil on windowsills that a man would no longer be advised to consider this as a sign of romance. Too bad.

The word basil is derived from the Greek word KING, suggesting that ancient healers regard this herb highly. This herb is an annual, with leafy stems, that has a bushy appearance. Basil is native to India, Africa and Asia but is cultivated worldwide. Basil has a sweet, sunny flavor and is a very versatile herb. Basil is excellent with green beans, peas potatoes, chicken dishes, tomato sauces and salads. The most important thing when adding basil to a dish is to only add at end of cooking time or when the dish is already prepared.

Basil is a member of the mint family; so instead of using a dinner mint, try mixing one teaspoon of dried basil in half hot water. Make sure you strain the herb. Drink one to two cups as needed daily.



Photo by Denine Rogers, RDN, LD, FAND

Oregano - (Origanum vulgare)

Oregano means "joy of the mountains" from the Greek or "a mountain" and gas "joy" or "brightness". This is because it grows wild in the mountains of Greece. Oregano is widely used in Italian, Greek and Mediterranean cookery, especially in pasta sauces, pizza toppings, tomato sauces, vegetable dishes and to flavor bread, oil, and vinegar. It is a warming, relaxing herb with antiseptic properties. To harvest fresh Oregano the plant's sprigs can be snipped when the plant is only 6 inches high. In fact, this makes the plant bushier and healthier. In June when the plant is budding so vigorously that it's hard to keep them picked, it is best to cut the whole plant leaving only the lowest set of leaves. This may sound rash, but this does stimulate the Oregano to start leafing out again within two weeks. Oregano leaves are fresh or dry or crushed. Oregano is added in Italian & Mexican dishes, tomato sauces, soups, sauces, stews, meats, salads, and marinades. It can be steep to make tea. Oregano is anti-inflammatory, analgesic pain reliever, toothaches, digestive aid and mouthwash. It also possibly relieves nervousness and depression.



Photo by Alice Henneman, MS, RD

Rosemary - (Rosmarinus officinalis)

Rosemary possessed powers of protection against evil spirits. In the middle ages, men and women would place sprigs under their pillows to ward off demons and prevent bad dreams. A classic flavoring for roasted or boiled lamb, stew and casseroles and added to marinades, vinegar, oil, and dressing. Used sparingly when you add Rosemary as a spice in cakes, biscuits, sorbet and baked or stewed apples. Harvesting of Rosemary can be done throughout the year. It is recommended to cut 4-inch pieces from the tips of the branches. Be careful not to remove more than 20% of growth at a time or it may stunt Rosemary's growth. Rosemary is small needle-like leaves used dried or fresh. Meat dishes, herb butters, combined with other herbs in salad dressings, potatoes and in breads. Rosemary is steep to make tea. Anti-spasmodic, anti-bacterial, analgesic, digestive aid. This tea can possibly treats depression, headaches. Rosemary can relieves colds. It stimulates hair growth to reveal good for scalp.



Photo by Denine Rogers, RDN, LD, FAND

Sage - (Salvia officinalis)

The Arabians associated sage with immortality or at least longevity and it was credited with increasing mental capacity. The genus name derives from the Latin word for salvation. Sage's culinary talent earns the herb a place in the garden and home. The volatile oils and tannins in sage are thought to account for its reputation for drying up perspiration. Anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory, anti-spasmodic, antiseptic, diuretic. It is anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory, anti-spasmodic, antiseptic and diuretic. It is steep to make tea in order to relieve sore throats, stress and depression. Sage is also used as a good hair rinse and it is known as a Chinese cure all.

The sage leaves are used as rubbed or ground. It has a strong woody flavor. It is use to season sausage, poultry stuffings, veal, pork, meat loaf, stews, and salads and grains. They are also cooked with liver, beef, fish, lamb, duck, goose, artichokes, tomatoes, asparagus, carrots, squash, corn potatoes, eggplant, snap beans, leeks, onions, brussels sprouts, cabbage, lemons, garlic, cheese, lentils, and shell beans.

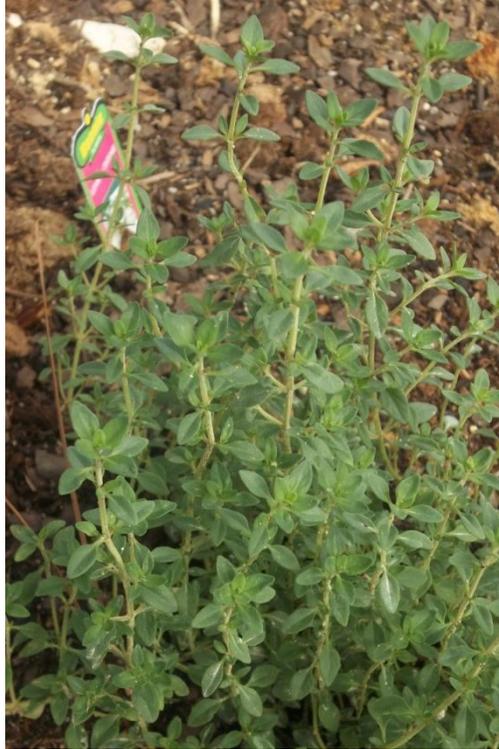


Photo by Denine Rogers, RDN, LD, FAND

Thyme - (Thymus vulgaris)

Thyme was an emblem of courage to the Greeks and to the Romans a remedy for melancholy. To tell someone they smelled of Thyme was a compliment in ancient Greece. The thymus is the original Greek name, used by Dioscorides. Widely used as culinary flavoring in marinades, meat, soup, stew, and casseroles. A strong antiseptic, antibacterial and antifungal herb. Bees have as deep an affection for Thyme as human do. The scent of Thyme is irresistible to bees and the finest flavored honey comes from its nectar. If you don't care to have these creatures invade your garden, harvest the leaves before fragrant blooms open in midsummer. You can take small amounts for immediate use, as needed or harvest the entire plant by cutting it back about 2 inches from the ground. The plant will grow back again before the season ends, but if you take this second harvest, which many do, the plant will be less hardy in the winter. The harvested stems can be tied in branches and hung to dry in a warm, airy, place or, you can strip the leaves and place them on a thin screen to dry before storing. You can also freeze herbs in an airtight container.

Thyme is fresh and dried, whole or ground. Earthy, subtle, versatile; use whole sprigs in soups, stews. It is especially seafood, poultry, pork, veal, tomato, vegetables, breads. Thyme is an antiseptic, anti-microbial and expectorant. You can crush fresh thyme leaves into wounds. Drink it as a tea to settle stomach aches, soothes coughs and muscles but make sure you use it sparingly.

Resources

Kowalchik, Claire and Hylton, W. H., (1987), Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs, Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pennsylvania