

Focus on Food

COOKING WITH FRESH HERBS: Seasonal & Holiday Fare

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In November, I'm still harvesting fresh herbs from my garden to complete a dish for dinner or a party. Even though most of our garden sleeps during the winter, a few hardy herbs like rosemary, thyme, sage, and savory will persist into the snowy weather. It's no surprise that they pair so well with the foods of the season: roasted poultry, squash and root vegetables, cranberries, apples, and baked goods.

Whether you're harvesting these herbs straight from the garden or "cheating" and purchasing them from the Co-op's produce department, the few minutes it takes to add fresh herbs to these dishes are worth the amazing flavor.

ROAST TURKEY & CHICKEN

Stuff sprigs of rosemary, sage, winter savory, and thyme under the skin of the turkey or chicken before roasting. This prevents

refrigerate to harden slightly before serving. Using the same technique, add roasted garlic and finely chopped rosemary leaves to softened butter.

POTATOES

In a food processor, blend any tender herbs into softened butter, then add that butter to mashed potatoes. Parsley or chives work well. Use 1/4 cup of herbs and 6 tablespoons of butter per 2 pounds of potatoes.

SQUASH & ROASTED VEGETABLES

Sage brown butter adds creamy goodness to mashed squash and pureed root vegetable soups and chowders. In a small skillet, fry a handful of whole, fresh sage leaves in a half stick of butter. You can use the fried leaves as a garnish or remove



Learn More: Take Maria's FREE "Cooking with Herbs" class on Thursday, November 11, 6:00-7:00 pm at the Concord Co-op. To register, email classes@concordfoodcoop.coop, stop by the store, or call 225.6840. (Photos: Sage, Rosemary, Chives & Thyme)

the herbs from burning and allows the flavors to penetrate the meat as it cooks. I usually put 1 to 3 sprigs per pound of poultry. (Sage and rosemary are potent, but thyme is mild.)

GRAVY

Separate the leaves from the stems of several sprigs each of rosemary, sage, and thyme. Place the stems in the hot gravy for several minutes to infuse it. Strain out the stems, then add 1 tablespoon of chopped leaves per cup of gravy. Or simply place the whole sprigs of rosemary, sage, and thyme in hot gravy for 10 minutes, strain, and serve. (I learned this trick from famed herbal chef and author Jerry Traunfeld.)

STUFFING

Sage and thyme offer classic flavors to stuffing. For 12 servings of stuffing, chop 1 to 3 tablespoons of fresh herb leaves and fold them into your stuffing. Add 1/2 cup of chopped fresh parsley for bright flavors.

BISCUITS, ROLLS & BUTTER

Fold chopped fresh chives and grated cheddar into biscuit batter for a tasty quick bread. Rosemary, sage, thyme, savory, and dill hold their flavor well when baked. Add a handful of fresh, chopped herbs into any dough or batter. If you don't have time to make fresh bread, flavor the butter instead. Use a food processor to mix 1 tablespoon of chopped chives and 1 teaspoon of fresh squeezed lemon into a stick of softened butter. Reshape in wax paper or place in serving dishes, then

them before adding to your recipe. Frying sage transforms and mellows the flavor. For roasted squash and root vegetables like potatoes, add several whole sprigs of rosemary, thyme, and/or savory to the pan. Or fold in chopped chives a few minutes before the vegetables are done roasting.

APPLE CIDER

A crock of cider accompanies all our fall and winter get-togethers. Pour 1 gallon of local cider into a crock pot and add 2 to 3 cinnamon sticks, 10 whole cloves, 3 allspice berries, 2 bay leaves, a sprig of fresh rosemary, 1/2-inch of fresh ginger root (sliced), and some freshly grated nutmeg. Let simmer at least one hour. Serve with local maple liquor or homemade cordial. (Available in liquor stores. Make your own by combining equal parts maple syrup and good vodka.)

CRANBERRIES

I'm a cranberry purist, but a sprig or two of fresh rosemary infuses nicely in homemade cranberry sauce (remove before serving). Or make this easy cordial: On the stove, dissolve 2 cups of sugar in 1 cup of water. Add cranberries and cook until tender. Fill a mason jar halfway with the mixture, then top it off with quality vodka and a few sprigs of rosemary. Let sit for two weeks, strain. Serve solo or in cocktails at parties. It also makes a nice gift. ■

Maria teaches and sees clients throughout New Hampshire. Visit www.wintergreenbotanicals.com for more recipes.