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10 Classic Culinary Herbs: Their Cultivation, Harvest & Storage, and Medicinal Use

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Our "Classic" Culinary Herbs.....all easy to access and grow in Massachusetts!

The Mint Family (<i>Lamiaceae</i>): Basil Lf (<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> , <i>O. sanctum</i>) Thyme Lf (<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>) Rosemary Lf (<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>) Sage Lf (<i>Salvia officinalis</i>) Oregano Lf (<i>Origanum vulgare</i>) Marjoram Lf (<i>Origanum marjorana</i>)	The Carrot Family (<i>Apiaceae</i>): Parsley Lf + Rt (<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>) Fennel Sd (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>) Dill Lf + Sd (<i>Anethum graveolens</i>)
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The Lily Family (<i>Liliaceae</i>): Garlic (<i>Allium sativum</i>) Chives (<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>)	The Nightshade Family (<i>Solanaceae</i>): Cayenne Pepper (<i>Capsicum annuum</i>)
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Herb Profiles

Garlic

****Chives have properties similar to garlic, however, they are a much milder acting herb

Primary Actions: Anti-Microbial, Expectorant , Anti-Catarral, Anti-Fungal, Vulnerary , Anti-Septic, Hypotensive , Aphrodesiac

Classic Uses: Respiratory Infections, Immunity, Cold & Flus, All-Purpose Remedy, Cardiovascular

Cultivation: Easy. Plant bulbs in the fall (Sept-Oct), spacing a few inches apart. Mulch well with straw, leaves, etc. Garlic will be the first greens to emerge from your garden in the spring! The greens are *delicious* and may be lightly harvested for food and used like scallions. One other method is to leave a few bulbs in the ground come harvest time, and the following spring you will have a large bunch of delicious early spring greens! Once greens have emerged remove mulch and keep well-weeded and well-watered.

Harvest & Storage: Harvest the full-grown heads in mid-summer once the leaves have begun to yellow- don't wait too long. Remove the yellowed and dirty leaves and cut stems- you may rinse them if desired. Let them dry in a basket or hang them to dry and cure. For storage try to grow varieties known for their ability to keep long into the winter (Go to the Garlic & Arts Festival!!!). Garlic braids are a classic way of drying and storing garlic and can be hung in the kitchen for easy access when you need a

head! Makes an excellent syrup that will keep for up to a year in the fridge.

Garlic Syrup (adapted from Michael Tierra's The Way of Herbs)

½ lb garlic, peeled and minced

Water (Distilled best)

Organic Apple Cider Vinegar

Glycerin (optional)

Raw Honey

Fill a 1 quart jar (=4 cups) with the garlic, then fill the jar with equal parts water and apple cider vinegar. Cover and let stand in a warm place for 4 days, shaking often. Add 1 cup glycerine or 1 cup honey and let stand one more day. Then strain, and filter it, squeezing the garlic to get the juices and add another cup of raw honey. Mix the honey in thoroughly. Use for coughs, colds, flus, respiratory infections or any infection, bronchial congestion, high or low blood pressure. 1 tbsp of the syrup 3x/day before meals. Safe for kids 1 year and up. Store in refrigerator for best results.

Basil

Primary Actions: Anti-spasmodic, Carminative,, Anti-Microbial, Anti-Catarral, Diaphoretic , Anti-Fungal, Anti-Septic, Vulnerary, Stimulant, Nervine, Anti-Depressant, Adaptogenic (Tulsi/Holy Basil- *Ocimum sanctum*)

Classic Uses: Nervous headaches, Anxiety and Tension, Depression

Cultivation: Grown as an annual in our climate, although perennial in the Tropics. Easy to start from seed. Does well transplanted or direct-seeded into the garden (wait until the soil is warm). Can sow seeds every couple of weeks to maintain an abundance of this herb if desired. Prefers full sun. Space 8-12 inches apart. Water well. Can be dug-up and potted in the fall to use through the winter in the indoor herb garden, but may not last until spring. Many different varieties- *O. sanctum* and *O. basilicum* are the most medicinal.

Harvest & Storage: Pick the young tops of the plant. Consistent harvest will promote more growth and larger yields. If the plant goes to flower it basically completes its life-cycle here in the North and the plant will begin to die-back, so constant harvest will prevent this from happening too early in the season. This is not an easy herb to dry for winter use due to the high water content of its leaves. The best method is to use a food dehydrator. Then store in glass jars out of direct sunlight. Basil makes an excellent tea, tincture or honey.

Basil Honey/ Basic Herbal Honey Recipe:

Fresh Flowering Basil Tops (Tulsi is the best)

Local Raw Honey

Chop-up the fresh flowering tops and leaves of basil and fill-up a small glass jar- do not pack it in, just loosely fill it. Then pour raw honey over the plant material until it completely covers it, its ok if the herbs float to the top, as long as they are coated in honey. Let mixture sit for 2 week minimum and strain (by gently heating the honey until its warm enough to

strain, *but do not boil!* OR don't strain at all and enjoy candied basil blossoms in the honey!
An herbal honey should last for at least 2 years, longer if stored in the fridge. You may repeat this same recipe with other aromatic herbs and roots for delicious results.

Rosemary

Primary Actions: Anti-Spasmodic, Carminative, Anti-Microbial, Anti-Septic, Rubifacient (increases circulation to localized areas when applied topically), Astringent (tones tissue), Diaphoretic, Circulatory Stimulant, Anti-Depressant

Classic Uses: Relieves mental fatigue and fogginess, Hair Tonic, Memory Tonic

Cultivation: Start from cuttings or starts. Naturally low germination rate in seeds. If starting from seeds, know that they are light-dependent and need coolish soils (55-60 degrees) to germinate. An annual in our climate (perennial in others) if left outside but can be over-wintered inside in a cool place. Hardy to 20 degrees F. Prefers full sun, lots of heat and drier soils.

Harvest & Storage: Harvest the same as basil- the young tender leaf tops. Also grows more the more you harvest it. Can harvest well into the fall, although it's at its peak medicinally mid-summer. Very easy to dry for winter use. Can simply dry the cut branches in a basket or tie them in bundles and hang from a clothes drying rack, etc. Once dry (just takes a few days) strip the leaves from the stem and store in glass jars out of direct sunlight. Makes an excellent tea or tincture.

Rosemary Tea/ Basic Herbal Tea Recipe (for leaves and flowers) :

1-2 tsp Rosemary

1 cup Water

Pour boiling water over the plant material. Cover and let steep for 5-10 minutes. Strain, add honey if desired, enjoy! Follow the same basic proportions to make an herbal infusion/tea for any other herb for which the part used is either the leaf or flower.

Parsley

Primary Actions: Carminative, Diuretic , Anti-Spasmodic

Classic Uses: Nutritional Powerhouse- Rich in Vitamin C, Iron, Beta-Carotene and Chlorophyll, Urinary Tract Health

Cultivation: Easy to start from seed, also does well direct-seeded into the garden.. Can plant crops in succession to maintain a constant supply. Prefers full sun, space 8-12 inches apart, water well. A biennial and but will go to flower in the second year of its life, so should be sown every year for culinary and medicinal use. Can bring inside for winter use or start seeds indoors for winter herb garden.

Harvest & Storage: Harvest the whole leaf from the base of the plant. The whole leaf is edible, stem and all. Dries well for winter use. Tie into bundles about 1 inch in diameter and hang in a warm place out of direct sunlight. Once dry cut the whole leaf and stem (with scissors or garden clippers) and store in a glass jar out of direct light. Makes a nice tea or tincture.

Dill Seed & Leaf

Primary Actions: Anti-Spasmodic, Carminative, Galactagogue (Seed), Anti-Inflammatory

Classic Uses: Stomachaches, Kids, Infant Colic

Cultivation: Easy to start from seed., however best to direct-seed this in the garden as it doesn't transplant very well. Light-dependent germinator, thin to 6 inches. Like parsley, can be sown every couple of weeks to keep a constant supply. Prefers full sun and lots of water. Space about 8 inches apart. Self-seeding annual and will easily self-seed itself in the garden for next year. The flowers will draw many beneficial insects and pollinators into the garden. Start seeds indoors for winter herb garden.

Harvest & Storage: Harvest the outer leaves when young- can use the whole leaf, stalk and all.

As the plant gets older harvest the more mature leaves that grow closer to the bottom of the plant, however the younger leaves can also be picked. To harvest the seed, allow the plant to flower and go to seed. Once the seeds are brown and hard (in the fall) cut top and gently place in a basket or bags. Remove the seeds manually.

Difficult to get just pure seed without proper seed-cleaning screens. To dry the leaves, make into small bundles (about ½ inch in diameter) and hang and dry like the others.

Difficult to dry perfectly, but still a superior product compared to store-bought.

Thyme

Primary Actions: Anti-Spasmodic, Carminative, Anti-Microbial, Anti-Septic, Anti-Catarral, Expectorant, Diaphoretic, Astringent, Vermifuge (expels intestinal worms)

Classic Uses: Respiratory Infections, Coughs, Laryngitis & Tonsillitis (as a gargle)

Cultivation: Easiest to grow from starts, but also not too difficult to start from seed. Perennial in our climate. Needs lots of sun, but not necessarily tons of water. Bees love the flower and thyme is famous for the delicious honey bees make from its sweet flowers. Cut back throughout the season to maintain vigorous growth. Many different varieties- Common Garden Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) is the most medicinal.

Harvest & Storage: Harvest before the plant goes to flower, which is in the spring. Use a sharp pair of scissors or garden clippers and give the plant a nice trim. Once cut the plant will keep on coming back, and in-fact consistent harvest will keep it from becoming leggy and too woody. Perennial in our climate and can be harvested well into the fall until a hard frost hits. Easy to dry for the winter since there is so little water in its leaves. Harvest the young tops and dry in a basket or even a brown bag in a warm place out of direct sunlight. Once dry (just takes a few days) crumble the herb in your hands over a sheet, big bowl, or an old brown bag to release as many of the small leaves as possible. Difficult to avoid stem contamination without more sophisticated equipment, but still totally worth it. Makes a great tea, tincture, honey or elixer.

Thyme Elixer/ Basic Elixer Recipe (From local Herbalist Tony(a) Lemos)

Fresh Thyme Sprigs (Lf + Stem)

Raw Honey

Brandy

Chop-up the fresh thyme, sprigs, don't worry about using the stem along with the leaves, and fill a jar of your choice. Fill the jar loosely, do not pack it. Next cover the thyme ½ in brandy and ½ in honey, so that it is a 50:50 mixture of the two. Cover, shake well and let sit for 2- 4 weeks minimum. Strain if desired or leave the plant material in and use as is! Excellent for colds, flus, coughs and respiratory infections. Great for kids age 1 year and up. Can use this same recipe for most aromatic herbs.

Sage

Primary Actions: Carminative, Anti-Microbial, Anti-Septic, Astringent, Anti-Catarral, Expectorant, Vunerary, Anti-Inflammatory

Classic Uses: Sore Throat- Tonsillitis, Laryngitis, Pharyngitis, Colds & Flus, Longevity Tonic

Cultivation: Easy to start from seed. Prefers full sun, heat, and drier, well-drained soil.

Space at least 1 foot apart. Perennial in our climate, though plants may lose vigor after a few years. Many different varieties- Common Garden Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is the most medicinal. White Sage (*Salvia apiana*) has similar properties but is slightly stronger than Garden Sage. White Sage is also easy to start from seed and may be grown as an annual in our climate. However, both species may be dug-up and brought in for winter use.

Harvest & Storage: Harvest the same as you would rosemary- cutting the young leafing tops.

Consistent harvest throughout the season will keep it from flowering and will promote more foliar growth. Can be harvested well into the fall., although it is at its peak medicinally in high summer. Beautiful purple flowers which attract many beneficial insects. Dries beautifully for winter use. Simply bundle-up you freshly picked sage sprigs (can be about 1 inch in diameter) and hang in a warm spot out of direct sunlight. Dries fairly quickly- just takes a few days- if its humid it may take a few days longer. To process, crumble the herb between your hands over a bowl, etc to separate the leaves from the stems. Dried sage becomes soft and fluffy upon processing and is very aromatic. Sage makes an excellent tea, tincture, honey or elixer.

Sage Throat Spray

Sage Tincture 40%

Water 40%

Raw Honey 20%

Combine all the ingredients in a jar and shake until the honey is mixed-in with the water and tincture. Pour into a spray bottle and use liberally as needed at first sign of a sore throat (can use up to 2 tbsp a day!) or once a cold or sore throat has set-in. Can store in the refrigerator 1- 2 years or on the shelf 6 mo- 1 year. Safe for kids 1 yr old and up.

Fresh Sage Tincture/ Basic Fresh Tincture Recipe:

1 Part Fresh Sage tops

2 Parts 100 Proof Vodka or Brandy (depends on your preference)

The simplest and most effective way to do this is to actually not worry about the proportions at all and do this: Chop-up the herb and lightly fill a jar of your choice, do not pack the herbs in. Next pour your vodka or brandy over the sage until it is completely covered. That is it,

it's simple and easy! In a few days check your tincture and top-off the alcohol as it often settles. Then let it sit 4 weeks minimum, or as long as you want! Then strain and bottle. Keep out of direct light or store in an amber bottle. Tinctures have a practically indefinite shelf-life and will keep for literally years and years. ****This same recipe can be used for virtually any other fresh leaf, root or berry!

Fennel Seed

Primary Actions: Anti-Spasmodic, Carminative, Anti-Microbial, Anti-Septic, Stimulant, Galactagogue, Anti-Inflammatory

Classic Uses: Indigestion, Gas, Infant Colic, Kids & Infants (they generally love the taste)

Cultivation: Not too difficult to start from seed but does best direct-seeded into the garden in early spring. Light-dependent germinator. Thin to about 2 ft apart in full sun and keep well-weeded and well-watered. Harvest seeds in late summer/fall. Perennial in our climate, hardy to -30 degrees F. Beautiful flowers attract beneficial insects. Many varieties- Common Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) is the most medicinal.

Harvest & Storage: For leaves, harvest similar to Dill. The leaves have the same medicinal action as the seeds, only more mild. The seeds should be ready for harvest in the late summer/fall. Harvest and process as you would Dill Sd. Makes a good tea, tincture, honey, elixer or glycerite.

Cayenne

Primary Actions: Anti-Spasmodic, Carminative, Anti-Microbial, Anti-Septic, Rubifacient, Astringent, Anti-Catarral, Circulatory Stimulant, Diaphoretic, Stimulant

Classic Uses: Circulation, Cardiovascular Tonic, Digestive Tonic

Cultivation: Annual in our climate. Start seeds indoor in late winter or buy high-quality starts. Needs lots of sun and heat, but will produce great fruit within our growing season. Space at least 1 foot apart.

Harvest and Storage: Wait until the long, thin peppers are bright red to pick. To dry them, take a needle and thread and, piercing through the stems, string them together either horizontally or vertically so they make a classic chile pepper "swag". They will dry fairly quickly this way and it also makes a warm and beautiful decoration. You can simply hang them in the kitchen and pluck the peppers off as needed! Or to make chile flakes, once the peppers are dry, cut off the stems and give a quick zoom in the food processor, blender, coffee grinder or even a mortar and pestle will do.

Oregano

****Marjorum has similar properties to oregano, however it is more mild in its action.

Primary Actions: Anti-Spasmodic, Carminative, Anti-Microbial, Diaphoretic, Expectorant, Nervine, Vulnerary, Anti-Septic

Classic Uses: Colds & Flus, Immunity, Infections

Cultivation: Both Oregano and Marjorum are easy to start from seed and transplants well from starts as well. Seeds are light-dependent germinators should be sown in early spring. Oregano is a perennial in our climate, and marjorum is an annual here and perennial in warmer climates. Both can easily be dug-up in the fall and brought in for

a winter herb garden. Oregano readily spreads in the garden and easily becomes a well-established thick patch of its own. Prefers full-sun and drier soils.

Harvest & Storage: To keep Oregano from becoming leggy and woody, harvest it often and also be sure to make your first-cut before it flowers, which is in late spring/early summer. Like the other Mediterranean herbs (thyme, rosemary, basil, sage), consistent harvest promotes thick foliar growth and increased yields. Multiple harvests can be made throughout the season well into the fall. Dries easily for winter use and can be dried in a basket or can be hung to dry like the others. Yields a potent, delicious product and is a great addition to winter cooking! Makes an excellent tea, tincture, elixer or honey

Glossary of Terms

Adaptogenic- Harmonizes the nervous system, endocrine system and immune system

Anti-Microbial- Inhibits growth of microorganisms (anything you can't see with the naked eye), including bacteria, viruses and some fungi

Anti-Depressant- Helps alleviate depression

Anti-Fungal- Inhibits the growth or multiplication of fungi

Anti-Catarral- Decongestant; Helps remove excess mucous in the body

Anti-Septic- Destroys and prevents the development of microbes

Anti-Spasmodic- Calms muscle spasms in the body

Anti-Inflammatory- Soothes and reduces inflammation in the body and its tissues

Astringent- Tones tissue

Carminative- Digestive aid, helps expel gas

Diuretic- Helps the body eliminate excess water

Diaphoretic- Induces perspiration; useful for fever management

Expectorant- Cough and respiratory aid

Galactagogue- Increases milk flow in nursing mothers

Hypotensive- Lowers abnormally elevated blood pressure levels

Nervine- Nervous system tonic

Rubifacient - Increases circulation to localized areas when applied topically

Stimulant- Quickens the physiological functions of the body

Tonic- Substance that is nurturing and enlivening

Vermifuge- Expels intestinal worms

Vulnerary - Wound-healing

Some basic guidelines & tips for drying and storing herbs:

- ⑩ Hang in bundles (no more than about 1-1.5 inches in diameter) to dry in a warm, well-ventilated space out of direct sunlight (a spare room, corner or kitchen beams will do!)
- ⑩ When bundling, be sure to tie the stems tightly-rubber bands and sinew work well- as the plants lose a lot of water upon drying and often shrink and fall out of their ties if tied too loosely
- ⑩ When drying flowers, berries, roots or other things that can't be bundled, laying them on a suspended screen or mesh is a great method of drying
- ⑩ Certain herbs dry well in baskets- in the culinary herb world this includes Rosemary, Thyme and Oregano. Certain berries such as elderberry and rose hip also dry well this way
- ⑩ Store in glass jars out of direct sunlight
- ⑩ In optimal conditions herbs are usually dry within a week
- ⑩ If there is humidity and the plants seem soggy don't worry, simply wait it out and once the humidity is gone the herbs will dry-out and be ready for processing
- ⑩ If the herbs seem the slightest bit moist still, do not process and put into jars, since they will mold. Be sure they are completely dry.
- ⑩ Garden clippers work great for cutting-up dried herbs to put in jars
- ⑩ Also, simply manually stripping leaves from stems, or crumbling herbs over a big bowl, sheet, brown bag, etc to remove the leaves from the stems works great too
- ⑩ If you don't have time to process the herbs once they are dried, they can temporarily be stored in brown bags with the tops rolled down until you have time to get to them
- ⑩ Just about all the culinary herbs (and most other herbs) can be easily ground into a powder in a coffee grinder. Just clean it out well, or get a grinder specifically reserved for herbs. A good old-fashioned mortar and pestle works great too
- ⑩ Remember: It's a labor of love! Very time consuming but completely worth it!

Some other methods of Preservation (*details available in many, many food preservation books*):

Blend herbs with a little water and freeze in ice-cube trays.

Freeze herbs whole or chopped-up in freezer bags.

Preserve in sea salt. Layer salt over herbs so that you have one layer of herbs and one layer of

salt. Afterwards, can use the flavored salt!
Herbal vinegars and oils.