



# HERBS

**LIFELONG LEARNING**



# HERBS

I hope you enjoy this handout about herbs. It is an informal document meant to be a companion to the live workshop. I hope to share a few interesting tidbits about some of my favorite plants and maybe inspire you to use the herbs mentioned in new ways.

I was lucky enough to grow up in central Indiana on a lot of 5 acres with a family that loved being outside. From before I can remember I was in the gardens around the house helping my mom plant flowers and tend to her extensive herb beds. We would harvest each fall before the winter took control and spend the winter months letting bundles of herbs dry. We would often package up dried samples in time to share with loved ones for the holidays.

I have always had herbs growing in some way or another since then. When I was a teenager I started working at the local garden center and eventually went to Purdue University to study Horticulture. After college I worked with clients for several years on creating beautiful and functional spaces around their homes which often included herbs incorporated into landscape beds or container gardens.

After five years designing landscapes I made the decision to change career paths, go back to school, and become a librarian. In the past eight years I have had the opportunity to enjoy gardening from a different angle by connecting with community members on a wide range of topics in workshops similar to this one.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about any of the information in this handout or to find out future presentations which may be scheduled.

Thanks!

Kendra



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# DILL

Dill is an herb that goes well with so many light dishes served year-round in Florida. Fish, eggs, and salads all benefit from the addition of this flavorful and forgiving herb.

According to the UF Extension Service, the best time for growing dill in Florida is November - December and if you can find it, the cultivar 'Long Island Mammoth' is the one to plant. Dill may be harvested and then frozen or dried for use throughout the rest of the year. For those wanting to prolong the growing season, protect seedlings and plants from the hot sun, cut back aggressively to keep the plant from going to seed too soon, and keep plants moist. Dill can do well in containers.

If you would like to save the seeds for re-planting, cut plants down after they have gone to seed. Dry out completely by hanging upside down and then shake out seeds and save.



# SALMON & BROCCOLI PASTA



## SALMON & BROCCOLI PASTA

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/2 Tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 pound salmon fillets (can sub 1 pound chicken breast, 2 breasts cut in half lengthwise)
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 small head blanched broccoli
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 cups cooked pasta
- 3/4 bunch of dill, chopped
- 2-3 Tablespoons lemon juice (about 1 lemon)

### DIRECTIONS

1. Heat a large non-stick skillet over medium high heat and add 1 Tablespoon olive oil.
2. Season salmon with salt and pepper, add to pan, and cook on each side about 2-4 minutes, depending on thickness (cook chicken 3-5 minutes per side until juices run clear).
3. Remove salmon from pan and set aside; wipe oil from skillet.
4. Keep skillet on medium and add remaining 1/2 Tablespoon oil, blanched broccoli, and garlic. Cook for 2 minutes.
5. Add in pasta, dill, and lemon juice and stir to warm through.
6. Serve salmon fillets over pasta.



# OREGANO

is a spicy herb that adds punch to many dishes including cheese, tomato, bean, pasta, meat and eggs. Plant oregano in pots or in landscape beds. It seems to grow well in Florida, as long as it is kept watered. The delicate leaves and cascading nature of the plant makes this herb an excellent companion planting for upright mixed containers. Consider purchasing plants then propagating by cutting or division. Dividing and re-potting oregano plants is best done after the plants flower. If you choose to start oregano seeds, do so in the spring.

Oregano is similar in appearance and taste to greek oregano and marjoram, only differing in their intensity of flavor. They may be planted and used interchangeably.

When cooking with oregano, add leaves in at the end of cooking time to preserve flavor.

The next time you are suffering from a cold, try drinking a tea made from oregano leaves. According to the book *21st Century Herbal* by Dr. Michael J. Balick, the oregano leaves will act as an expectorant to treat inflamed bronchial membranes.

Photo by jammick (Young chives Uploaded by MaybeMaybeMaybe)

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# CHIVES

According to the book *An Illustrated Guide to Herbs: Their Medicine and Magic* by Anna Kruger, some cooks have found chives to be a much needed answer if they have a family member who is sensitive to onions, since many who can't handle raw or cooked onions are perfectly okay to eat dishes flavored with chives instead. Even if you aren't using chives as a last resort, it can still be worth the effort of keeping a small pot of this easy-to-grow herb on your windowsill or patio. Chopped chives are a great addition to potatoes and soft cheeses.

The UF/IFAS Extension Service recommends purchasing plants over trying to start seed.

If you do want to avoid buying full grown plants, consider planting chive sets, similar to how you would grow onions. See

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mv048> for more information on planting chives.

Chives really do not hold up well if dried. It is much better to use fresh or frozen. Consider topping your next dish of mashed potatoes with a sprinkling of finely chopped chives. Chives also perk up basic salads without a lot of extra work. A very easy spread for crackers or vegetables is a blend of cream cheese, finely chopped chives, and minced garlic. This dip can be enhanced by adding other herbs too, but that is optional. Consider using kitchen shears to chop the chives for easier clean-up.

# THYME

The University of Florida Nassau County Extension has an interesting page on their website about thyme worth checking out: <http://nassau.ifas.ufl.edu/horticulture/herbs/thyme.html>

On the website, a little snippet of history on this herb is shared. Greeks used to put thyme in their baths and burn incense made of the herb because it was said to be a source of courage.

Thyme is not difficult to grow in either planting beds or pots in Florida. It likes the sun and is pretty resilient as long as it doesn't go too long without being watered. One of the most difficult decisions gardeners will have when it comes to thyme is deciding which variety to plant. There are so many varieties on the market! Consider the aesthetic qualities of the various types and how they would pair with other things planted in your pots and landscape beds. Some varieties of thyme are even excellent groundcovers which give off a pleasant scent when planted between stepping stones.



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# PARSLEY

Parsley can be a pain to get going from seed. It takes a while to germinate and is not forgiving with its constant moisture requirement. For this reason, purchasing full grown plants is seen as a wise investment for many people. Keep the plant well watered and prune heavy and often to keep it from going to seed in the Florida heat.

Parsley is a wonderful addition to many dishes and is found in many recipes. Consider making a simple and delicious hummus by combining in a food processor or blender a can of drained and rinsed chickpeas with six cloves of minced garlic, a tablespoon of lemon juice, 3 tablespoons of parsley, and enough extra virgin olive oil to bring the mixture to your preferred consistency.

If you find yourself in between parsley plantings, this is an easy plant to purchase at grocery stores and farmers markets. Keeping the bunch upright in a vase or glass jar inside your refrigerator will measurably extend the viability of the herb.

# SAGE

This herb is widely known and used. In his book *Florida's Best Herbs & Spices*, Charles Boning claims this herb is "an outstanding choice for Florida yards." The plant holds up well in heat and drought and is fairly easy to grow. There are many varieties of sage, each providing a different leaf appearance and flavor. Variegated forms are available and are an excellent choice for a mixed container planting to add a soft delicate touch. Pineapple sage is another varietal option, which is fun to add to salsas and fish dishes. There are edible and ornamental varieties of sage available in the marketplace, so keep this in mind when selecting a variety for your particular need.

If sage is planted in a constantly moist location it will sometimes contract a mildew. It doesn't do well in areas with salt spray.

Be aggressive when harvesting sage. It does well with frequent pruning. It may be used fresh or dried. Consider using it in marinades, omelets, stuffing, and stews.





# ROSEMARY

Rosemary is a fragrant woody herb. This slow grower will eventually become a small shrub and integrates well into planting beds. In Florida, it's best to keep it somewhat protected from the heat of the sun. Around the holidays it is easy to find this plant in topiary form. It will live a considerable time in pots but does well planted in the ground with loam or compost.

Trim the tips often to keep a nice shape on the plant and provide yourself with plenty of tasty accompaniments to your dinners. Rosemary will hold up well if frozen or dried.

Cooking with rosemary is very easy as long as you remember that the herb provides a strong flavor, so be careful not to add too much. Rosemary pairs well with tomatoes, beans, and potatoes.

## Easy Roasted Rosemary Potatoes

2 tbsp fresh rosemary, finely chopped

2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

6 large potatoes (or its equivalent in fingerling, red, or other gourmet potatoes you happen to like) cut into wedges

Salt & Pepper

Preheat oven to 400. Spread potato wedges on cookie sheet in a single layer. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt, pepper, and rosemary. Toss to coat as best as possible. Roast in oven for 30 minutes or until crisp. Serve as is, or top with freshly grated parmesan.





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## LEMON BALM

Growing lemon balm isn't difficult, but be aware that Florida heat can dry out your landscape beds and pots pretty quick. According to the Sarasota Extension Office, due to the sun and heat, many variegated forms of lemon balm do not keep their variegation and will sometimes wilt. For that reason, it is best to plant the green leaved varieties in partial shade for long lasting results.

Lemon balm is not commonly used in many recipes, but can flavor basic marinades with a soft pleasant flavor. Combine chopped leaves with white wine or rice vinegar, olive oil, and salt and pepper for a wonderful addition to salads and pastas.

Visit

<http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu/FCS/FlaFoodFare/Lemon%20Balm.pdf>

for more tips from the Sarasota County Extension about lemon balm.

# MINT

Mint is easy for most people to grow. The trouble usually comes in keeping the herb in check once it finds a spot it loves. Mint is a spreading invasive perennial which usually likes some protection from the hot Florida sun. Keeping mint contained is best accomplished with container gardening. There are many varieties of mint available for purchase. Before buying a plant to transplant into your garden or decorative patio pots, be sure to taste to see if it is the flavor you want. Mint also roots quickly when taken from cuttings. Trim heavily and often in order to keep your pots of mint looking healthy and not straggly.

Mint accents are used often in dessert recipes. Keeping a pot of mint growing and handy saves a lot of money for the times you find yourself in need of just a few leaves for a recipe or to garnish.

## **The Perfect Mojito**

10 or so mint leaves

quarter of a lime, juiced

2 T sugar

1/2 oz. clear rum

club soda or sparkling mineral water to fill glass

Put mint leaves in glass and smash up a bit to release the mint oil. Add the remaining ingredients and serve in a fun glass.





# BASIL

Basil is an herb easily grown from seed. Plant seeds in potting medium and keep moist until germination. Thin out seedlings once second leaves start to emerge. Once plant starts to take off, continually pinch the tops off to keep plant bushy and compact.

Harvest leaves often by pinching the tops of the plants off when using them in a dish. The youngest leaves taste the best and are void of the bitter flavor old ones sometimes have. When plants start to yellow, fertilize or harvest the entire plant and start with a new batch of seedlings.

Leaves are best used fresh or frozen. Freezing in ice cube trays with olive oil is a nice way of always having the herb around and ready to add to soups and roasts.

# SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Below are the resources I consulted while preparing this presentation and handout. For gardening topics, books can provide ample inspiration for putting together gorgeous potted combinations and to get basic information on just about any plant you find of interest. When consulting websites, consider what type of information you most want to know and that will help you limit your results in the correct manner. For growing herbs in Florida, I liked consulting the various extension service agencies that are available. This way I was able to find specific local information about growth habits and tips for how I might be most successful in this climate. These sites are also sponsored or affiliated with state and county government agencies, so they are free from sales pitches and bias. If you are looking for information about a specific variety or cultivar of plant, commercial sites are; however, sometimes the only way to go.

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Stephens, J.M. (1994). *EDIS: Dill*. Retrieved from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mv060>

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