

# Harvesting and Drying Herbs

by [Adam Gilpin](#) on August 12, 2010

## Why Dry Your Herbs?



Herbs Being Hung to Dry

After you have grown your herbs use them fresh straight from your herb garden. But outside the herb growing season you can still enjoy your herbs by preserving them.

Drying herbs is one of the most popular methods of preservation. This is achieved by picking the fresh herbs, drying them using one of the methods described in this article, and storing them in jars for use when the growing season has finished.

There are other preservation methods which I'll describe later. One that's becoming increasingly popular is freezing.

## Harvesting Your Herbs

If you are going to preserve some of your herbs by drying them it's important to make sure your herbs are in the best possible condition when you harvest them.

Timing is a very important factor in the harvesting of herbs. Wind and heat can disperse the essential oils of the herbs, so you should choose a calm and dry morning during midsummer to harvest them. Also bear in mind that fewer oils are produced by your herb plants on extremely wet days.

You should harvest the herbs just after the dew has dried from the leaves and before the flowers open. And when you harvest your herbs don't take more than a third of a plant's foliage at one time. They need a good amount of foliage to re-grow.

Finally don't forget that herbs are very attractive to garden insects, so once you have harvested them inspect them well for insects, and if you are going to preserve them by drying check for damaged leaves.

# Preserving Herbs

There are three ways that are frequently used to preserve herbs for later use:

1. Drying
2. Freezing
3. Preserving them in a medium like salt or vinegar.

Preservation by drying herbs used to be the most widely used method, but nowadays fridges and freezers are more frequently used to preserve herbs by freezing.

You can also preserve your herbs by preparing herbal oil infusions

## 1. Drying Herbs for Preservation



The best way of drying herbs is to hang them up. If you can't do this lay them out flat. The method you use will depend upon the type of herb you are preserving.

If your herbs have stems bundle six to twelve stems together and remove any foliage near the base of the stems. Secure your herb bundles with string and hang them up in a cool location away from sunlight.

If the herbs you want to dry are leafy and have very little stem, they can be dried by placing them on a screen or a rack. (see the photograph of the drying cabinet).

If you use a drying cabinet for drying herbs turn the herbs frequently so that they dry thoroughly.

It's also possible to use a food dehydrator to dry herbs, and some people use ovens at a low heat setting, although most experts don't recommend this method.

## 2. Freezing Herbs for Preservation

Freezing herbs is a good way to preserve herbs. Cut the herbs into ¼ inch pieces and place on a baking sheet lined with wax paper. Once the herbs are frozen, you can place them together in a bag and store them in the freezer until you need to use them.

### ***3. Using Salt or Vinegar to Preserve Herbs***

The third way to preserve herbs is by storing them in a liquid. For instance, you can cover herbs like chopped mint, basil or tarragon with vinegar and they will be preserved for several months. Or you can make a flavored salt to preserve herbs by alternating layers of fresh herbs and salt.

When completely dry separate the brown herbs from the flavored salt and store them in an airtight container.

## **Fresh Herbs or Dry Herbs?**

Despite the variety of different ways available to preserve herbs, wherever possible use your herbs fresh right out of the garden. After all, isn't this one of the main reasons you created your herb garden?

Pick your herbs fresh and clean them well before using them in recipes. Do this by placing the herbs in a bowl filled with cool salty water (add about two tablespoons of salt to the bowl). The salt in the water will drive away insects without damaging the plant.

After washing, remove the herbs from the water and dry them in a salad spinner.

Enjoy your herbs,

*Adam Gilpin*