



Wendy Ulrich
Lab Technician
Alabama Cooperative Extension System
C. Beaty Hanna Horticulture & Environmental Center
Plant Diagnostic Lab
News Release

Harvesting Herbs for the Holidays

Question: I started my first herb garden this year and would love to include some of my herbs in the coming holidays. Any suggestions?

Answer: I'm glad you had the joy of growing herbs in the garden this year and hope you also enjoyed experimenting with the wonderful flavors of cooking with fresh herbs. Some of my fond summer memories are of corn on the cob bathed in basil butter and vegetables grilled on rosemary stems sprinkled with fresh dill and thyme. If you didn't get a chance to try out some of these ideas it's still not too late to plan for some delicious, herbal, sensory delights during the upcoming holidays!

Before the first frost takes the basil (which doesn't preserve very well by drying) harvest the tender leaves and make some basil butter to put in the freezer to use on root vegetables and on fresh baked breads. Herbal butters flavored with basil or sage is easy to make and worth the time you put into them now. Just mix softened, room temperature butter with some chopped basil leaves (or herb of choice) and blend well. You can roll the butter into a log with plastic wrap and freeze to slice later or use a butter mold or tub to store in the freezer until needed. Sage butter is "to die for" on hot biscuits; or try some chive butter on mashed potatoes. Basil may also be frozen in ice cube trays with just enough water to hold the leaves together, then store the cubes in a zip lock bag to add to soups and sauces this winter.

Be sure to label and date your herbs when you store them in the freezer. These butters may also be used right away but benefit from aging to blend the flavors. When planning for the Holidays these butters may also be created in decorative candy molds for festive individual butters at the table. Place enough butter in the molds and tap to be sure the butter fills all parts of the mold, place in the freezer until hard and unmold and place in a zip lock bag and refrigerate or freeze until right before it's time to set the table (the small individual butters soften quickly). Believe me these will be a hit that will be remembered and earn you rave reviews.

My favorite herbal butter recipe is for Orange Thyme Butter. It may sound complicated but it's really quite simple and you can't beat it for flavor.

Orange Thyme Butter

¼ pound unsalted butter (softened to room temperature)
¾ teaspoon fresh grated fresh orange zest
¾ teaspoon fresh orange juice
¾ teaspoon chopped fresh thyme

Blend all ingredients together and place in tub or mold, or roll into log. Cover with plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator overnight to combine flavors. Butter may also be kept in the freezer for a longer period of time.

Amounts are to taste, I usually use closer to a tablespoon of each added ingredient to the butter.

This is a wonderful butter for Thanksgiving as the flavor compliments many of the traditional dishes served during this holiday. Herbal butter makes a wonderful “Hostess Gift” if you’re not the one doing all the cooking for the holiday meal. To make it even better, gift it in a pretty dish or container.

Another great gift idea is herbal vinegars. And these are also a wonderful way to preserve the harvest. Steep herbs in vinegar just as you would make a fine cup of tea; bring some vinegar to almost boiling and pour over fresh herbs, cover and steep till the desired strength of flavor. Remove the herbs with a strainer, (for clearer vinegar pour through a coffee filter) and bottle in a pretty bottle with a plastic cap or cork. A great combination to try is rice vinegar and purple basil. This is light flavored and a pretty vinegar for fruits, vegetables, and salads. Experiment with different combinations of vinegars and herbs. Red wine vinegar and rosemary make a wonderful marinade for beef. These vinegars also make wonderful hostess gifts or are a great addition to a food basket.

Another great idea for the holidays is to garnish and decorate with fresh herbs. Turkey and ham are a treat for the eye when served up with a garnish of fresh herbs and they double duty as a seasoning to go with the meal. Try some sugared herbs along with sugared fruits as garnish or decoration, or you may even tuck some fresh herbs in with the folded napkins at each place setting.

These are just a few ideas for the holidays not only for happy tasting but also for gift giving. With the economy the way it is this year, gifts of food and homemade goodies are really going to be appreciated, so give the gift of love and you’ll be a favorite on everyone’s gift list this year.

For more about this topic please contact Wendy Ulrich, Lab Technician, at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email ulricwg@aces.edu.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and other related acts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all

people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability. Visit our website at www.aces.edu/StClair.