



Herbs

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Get to know your herbs and your taste buds will thank you. There are so many different types and flavours of herbs to discover. Broadly they can be split into two kinds: hardy, woody herbs that can be cooked, and the soft, more delicate varieties that are best used fresh.

Try these

- Basil
- Bay
- Coriander
- Oregano
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Thyme
- Lemon thyme

- Chervil
- Chives
- Marjoram
- Dill
- Fennel
- Mint
- Basil mint
- Flat-leaf parsley
- Curly parsley
- Tarragon
- Borage

★ Did you know?

- ★ Our ancestors used herbs in their cooking and for health remedies. Herbal seeds have been found in pre-historic dwellings dating back as far as 500,000 years.
- ★ In the Middle Ages, people put thyme under their pillows because they thought it helped protect against nightmares.
- ★ If you run woody herbs under hot water for a few seconds, the natural oils loosen, making them more fragrant and easier to cook with.
- ★ Some people believe rosemary improves your memory. It is said that Greek scholars wore wreaths of it on their heads. In Hamlet, Shakespeare wrote: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance."
- ★ Parsley is said to be a natural breath freshener – chew on a couple of leaves and you will feel fresh and ready to chat. Some people chew mint leaves because they believe it can relieve tummy upsets.

How do you know if it's a herb or a spice?

As a general rule, herbs come from the leaf of a plant, while spices are usually from other parts, such as the root, stem, bulb, bark or seeds.

When would you choose a woody herb?

Woody herbs are generally too powerful to be eaten raw. They are usually cooked alongside whatever they're intended to flavour and are often removed before serving. Woody herbs dry well, and although you don't get quite the same flavour as you do when you use fresh, dried woody herbs are worth using as a substitute.

When would you choose a soft herb?

Soft herbs aren't as strong as woody ones – they can be eaten raw in salads, and scattered over or stirred into cooked food before serving. Once picked, wrap in damp kitchen paper and keep them in the fridge until needed. Dried soft herbs have very little flavour, so always try to use fresh.

What do woody herbs look, smell and taste like?

Bay is a small tree with thick shiny green leaves. Bay leaves give a real heartiness and depth of flavour to stocks and stews and they're great in stuffings or threaded between pieces of meat on barbecued skewers.

Marjoram is oregano's little brother. Look at their leaves to tell them apart: marjoram has thinner, more delicate leaves which are rounded rather than pointed. It's used a lot in northern European cooking and is great friends with beetroot, carrots, pork and baked fish. Although it's strong, marjoram is just mild enough to be eaten raw.

Oregano is a small plant with thick furry leaves that grows all over southern Europe. It's used widely in Italian, Greek and southern French cuisine, goes well with lamb, tomatoes, peppers and grilled fish, and is great on pizzas and pasta.

Rosemary is a tall bush with long woody branches and thin leaves that look a bit like pine needles. It's widely used in European cuisines and goes brilliantly with lamb, beef, bread and strong Mediterranean flavours like garlic, anchovies and olives.

Sage is a small bush with long, oval-shaped furry leaves. It's very good friends with pork and in Britain we've been putting sage in sausages and stuffings for centuries. The Italians like it with veal and pumpkin, and it also goes well with pasta when cooked in butter till crispy, then spooned over ravioli or tortellini.

Thyme is a short, sturdy bush with long thin branches and tiny perfumed leaves. Like bay, it's a very popular ingredient in stews and stocks and goes well with all sorts of vegetables like carrots, artichokes, mushrooms, swede and leeks.

What do soft herbs look, smell and taste like?

Basil is an incredibly aromatic herb that smells and tastes somewhere between aniseed, cinnamon, lemon and pepper. It's used all over southern Europe and the Far East, where Thai basil is a key ingredient in many dishes. It's great in salads, wonderful with salmon, it's the basis of pesto, which we all know and love, and it's absolute best friends with tomatoes.

Tarragon is a delicate plant with long floppy green leaves. It has a flavour quite like aniseed and goes really well with chicken, eggs, tomatoes and potatoes.

Chervil is similar to tarragon but its flavour isn't quite as strong. It has very delicate leaves and is good in salads and lightly flavoured creamy soups. Chefs love to use chervil leaves for garnishing food because they make just about anything look beautiful!

Chives are part of the onion family and have a sharp oniony flavour. They're most often chopped and sprinkled over the top of cooked dishes like soups and salads for presentation and extra

flavour. They get on well with eggs and also with boiled new potatoes.

Coriander is a fragrant herb with a flavour that people tend to love or hate. It's used right across Asia in Thai salads, Vietnamese soups, Indian curries and Middle Eastern meatballs. When crushed in a pestle and mortar, the stalks have even more flavour than the leaves and are a key ingredient in curry pastes. It's also used widely in Latin America in salads and sauces like guacamole. It's great friends with chilli, lime and cumin seeds.

Fennel is a tall thin plant with feathery leaves very similar to the green tops you get on a bulb of fennel. It too is aniseedy in taste and goes very well with fish and shellfish. Fennel stalks have a strong flavour, especially when they're dried, and are great tucked under a whole fish or a loin of pork and roasted.

Dill looks similar to fennel but has a slightly different flavour. It's used all over eastern Europe, from Scandinavia down to Greece, and most famously in gravalax – Swedish cured salmon. It goes really well with all kinds of fish, pickle and mustard as well as root vegetables, such as beetroot.

Mint is very often used with sweet flavours instead of savoury. It goes well with fruit, such as peaches, figs and melon, and pastry chefs always use sprigs of it to garnish their desserts. The two savoury flavours it works best with are roast lamb (everyone in the UK has tried lamb and mint sauce!) and chillies, where its fresh flavour balances the heat very well.

Parsley is a strong-flavoured aromatic herb that comes in two varieties: flat-leaf and curly. Chefs prize parsley stalks and use them to flavour stocks, and the leaves are great chopped and sprinkled over vegetables, soups, pasta dishes and even salads. Parsley is best friends with garlic, lemon, ham and mushrooms.

Top tips



- ★ When cooking hot dishes, add herbs towards the end, but do the opposite when seasoning cold foods.
- ★ To get the tiny thyme leaves off their woody stalks, rub each sprig through your fingers, or rub a small bunch between both palms and watch them shower down. Don't forget you can use the bare sprigs to flavour soups and stews.
- ★ Mint works well in desserts, such as fruit salad, and is great in cool, fruity summer drinks too. Try it simply with sliced lemon to flavour water.
- ★ Tomatoes and basil are a famous pairing and make the ultimate simple summer salad (don't keep basil in the fridge, it'll quickly turn black).
- ★ Use fresh herb leaves, such as mint or sage, to make herbal tea – just add hot water.

Basil pesto

Makes roughly
12 tablespoons



Jamie's
top tip

When making pesto it's really important to taste and adjust the flavour as you go - add an extra squeeze of lemon juice, a splash more oil or a pinch of seasoning until you've got it just right.

Ingredients

- 50g pine nuts
- 30g Parmesan cheese
- 100g fresh basil
- ½ a clove of garlic
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- extra virgin olive oil
- 1 lemon

Equipment list

- Small frying pan (20cm)
- Weighing scales
- Wooden spoon
- 3 small bowls
- Box grater
- Chopping board
- Knife
- Pestle and mortar
- Measuring spoons

Here's how to make it

- 1 Place a small frying pan over a medium heat.



- 2 Carefully add the pine nuts and toast for 2 to 3 minutes, or until very lightly golden – keep them moving so they don't burn, then tip into a bowl and put to one side.
- 3 Use the finest side of a box grater to grate the Parmesan onto a chopping board, then transfer to a bowl and put to one side.
- 4 Pick and roughly tear the basil leaves, discarding the stalks.
- 5 Peel and roughly chop the garlic, then add it to a pestle and mortar with a tiny pinch of salt and the torn basil leaves.
- 6 Bash the mixture to a paste, then add the pine nuts and pound again, but leave a little bit of texture.
- 7 Scrape the mixture out into a bowl and add half the Parmesan.
- 8 Stir gently, then add 3 to 4 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil – you need just enough to bind the sauce and get it to an oozy consistency – then stir through the remaining Parmesan.
- 9 Cut the lemon in half.
- 10 Add a squeeze of juice to the pesto, using your fingers to catch any pips.
- 11 Have a taste and season with a pinch of pepper and a squeeze more lemon juice, if you think it needs it.



Coriander and yoghurt chutney

Serves 4



Jamie's top tip

I like serving this alongside a homemade curry, but it also makes a lovely dip for Crunchy fresh veg or mini poppadoms.



Ingredients

- 1 bunch of fresh coriander
- optional: ½ a fresh green chilli
- 1 lime
- ½ a clove of garlic
- 4 heaped tablespoons natural yoghurt
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Equipment list

- Blender
- Chopping board
- Teaspoon
- Knife
- Microplane
- Measuring spoons
- Spatula
- Serving bowl



Here's how to make it

- 1** Place the coriander (stalks and all), into a blender.
- 2** If using fresh chilli, hold the stalk-end steady on a chopping board, then run a teaspoon down the cut side to scoop out the seeds and white pith.
- 3** Finely slice the chilli and add to the blender.
- 4** Finely grate the zest from half the lime using a microplane, then add it to the blender.
- 5** Cut the lime in half.
- 6** Squeeze the juice from half the lime into the blender.
- 7** Peel and add the garlic, followed by the yoghurt and a tiny pinch of salt and black pepper.
- 8** Whiz together until you have a nice smooth consistency – then use a spatula to scrape the mixture down the sides and whiz again to make sure everything gets thoroughly blended.
- 9** Have a taste and add a squeeze more lime juice if you think it needs it.
- 10** Tip into a serving bowl, then serve.



Salsa verde

Serves 4



Jamie's top tip

The secret to a good salsa verde is to chop all the ingredients very finely by hand to really get all the flavours to mingle and work together. Dollop over grilled or roasted meat and fish to add heaps of super-tasty herby loveliness.

Ingredients

- ½ a bunch of fresh coriander
- ½ a bunch of fresh mint
- 1 clove of garlic
- 1 fresh green chilli
- 4 spring onions
- 2 ripe tomatoes
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 lime
- extra virgin olive oil

Equipment list

- Knife
- Big chopping board
- Teaspoon
- Measuring spoons
- Serving bowl

Here's how to make it

1 Pick a few coriander leaves and put to one side, then finely chop the rest of the bunch, stalks and all, on a big chopping board.

2 Pick and finely chop the mint leaves, discarding the stalks.



- 3** Peel and finely chop the garlic.
- 4** Carefully slice the chilli in half lengthways.
- 5** Hold the stalk-end of each half steady, then run a teaspoon down the cut sides to scoop out the seeds and white pith.
- 6** Finely chop the chilli, then wash your hands thoroughly.
- 7** Trim and finely chop the spring onions.
- 8** Roughly chop the tomatoes.
- 9** Start chopping everything together, bringing it all into the middle of the board and chopping and mixing as you go until it's all nice and fine.
- 10** Season with a tiny pinch of salt and pepper.
- 11** Cut the lime in half, then squeeze over most of the juice.
- 12** Drizzle with 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil, then mix together on the board.
- 13** Have a taste and add a little more lime juice, extra virgin olive oil or a tiny pinch more salt and pepper, if you think it needs it.
- 14** Scrape into a bowl, scatter with the reserved coriander leaves, then serve.



For nutritional information ask your teacher.