

## 6.3

# Herbs, Spices, & Aromatics

### READING PREVIEW

#### Key Concepts

- Identifying and using herbs
- Identifying and using spices
- Identifying and using additional aromatic ingredients
- Preparing and using aromatic combinations

#### Vocabulary

- battuto
- bouquet garni
- Cajun trinity
- cured foods
- herbs
- matignon
- mirepoix
- sachet d'épices
- spice blends
- spices
- standard mirepoix
- white mirepoix

“**H**erbs are like brilliant jewels that add sparkle to any dish.”

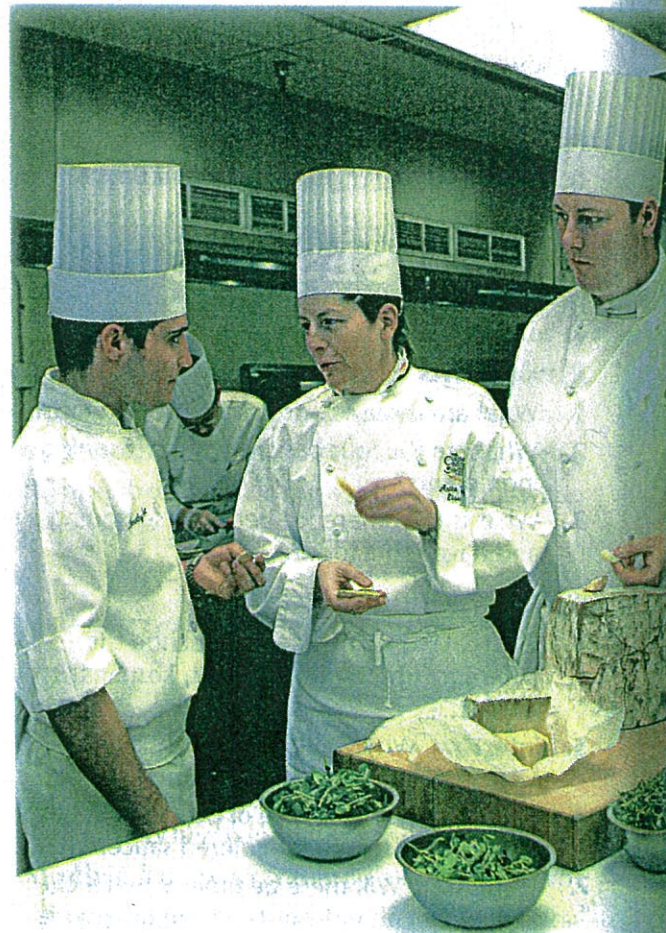
— Anita Eisenhauer

## Herbs

**Herbs** are the leaves and stems of certain plants. They are used to flavor a wide variety of foods. Some are considered sweet; others are thought of as savory.

Certain herbs or combinations of herbs are associated with particular cuisines. The taste and smell of basil and oregano, for example, might make you think of Italian foods. Tarragon and chives are often used in French cooking. Cilantro and parsley are important herbs in Chinese cooking. Oregano and mint are key flavors in Greek cooking.

**Selecting and Storing Herbs** Fresh herbs have intense flavors. When you select a fresh herb, smell it to check for a good aroma. As a fresh herb ages, its flavor gets weaker. Fresh herbs should also have a good color. The leaves should be intact. Bruised or wilted leaves and leaves that have become pale or turned yellow will not have the best flavor. Stems should be firm



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and not split. If the roots are still intact, as they may be on herbs such as cilantro or dill, they should be dry, not soft or wet.

Store fresh herbs in the refrigerator, wrapped loosely in a damp paper towel in a loosely closed plastic bag. Use fresh herbs within a few days for the best flavor.

Many herbs are sold as either dried or ground leaves. Some are sold as a powder. Drying the herbs drives out the moisture in the herb, concentrating the herb's flavor. Be sure to smell dried herbs before you use them. They should have a pleasant smell. If they smell musty or have practically no aroma, they are probably too old to be of any use in cooking.

Buy just enough dried herbs to last six months. Store them in tightly sealed containers, away from heat, moisture, and direct sunlight.

**Using Fresh and Dried Herbs** Review your recipe to find out when to add fresh herbs. Some recipes call for whole sprigs, some for leaves, and some for only stems. Rinse and dry herbs before chopping them or adding them to a dish. If your recipe requires cut herbs, cut them as close as possible to the time you need them. Once you cut a fresh herb, it starts to lose some of its flavor.

Whole sprigs and stems are usually added to a dish at the start of cooking so the herb can gently flavor the entire dish. For a more intense flavor, chopped or whole fresh leaves are added to a dish at the end of cooking.

Dried herbs often have a more intense flavor than fresh ones because they contain less water. (There are some exceptions. Dried chives, chervil, and parsley have a less intense flavor than the fresh herb.) In general, you can substitute one teaspoon of a dried herb for every tablespoon of fresh herbs called for in a recipe. Most dry herbs need to be added to the dish early on as you cook so the liquid in the dish rehydrates them and the herbs can flavor the dish.

**FIGURE 6-5**  
**Adding Basil to Tomato Sauce**

Fresh basil or oregano is often added to tomato sauce.

**Comparing/Contrasting** Why might adding fresh basil to a finished sauce give a different flavor than adding dried basil when you start to cook the sauce?



# Herbs

## Basil

Basil (BAY-zill) has pointed green leaves. Purple varieties and large- or small-leaved varieties are available. Some varieties have the aroma of cinnamon, clove, lemon, or other flavors. Uses include flavoring sauces (including pesto sauce), salad dressings, chicken, fish, and pasta. Basil is also used to flavor oils and vinegars.



## Bay Leaf

Bay leaves are smooth and rigid. They may be available fresh but are typically used dry. Bay leaves retain their flavor even after drying. Bay leaves are used to flavor soups, stews, stocks, sauces, and grain dishes. Remove bay leaves from the prepared food at the end of the cooking process.



## Chervil

This member of the parsley family has dark green, curly leaves. Dried chervil (CHER-vil) has far less flavor than fresh. Chervil has a flavor similar to parsley with a hint of licorice. It is one of the herbs typically used in the French blend of herbs referred to as “fines herbes” (FEENZ erb).



## Chives

Chives belong to the onion family and have a subtle but savory flavor. Chives grow as long, hollow stems. The flowers or buds have a more intense flavor and are sometimes used to flavor or garnish a salad. Dried chives have far less flavor than fresh chives. Chives are typically minced or snipped before they are added to a dish.



## Cilantro

Cilantro (see-LAHN-troh) is very similar in shape to flat-leaf parsley. The leaves have scalloped edges. The flavor is fresh, tangy, sharp, and distinctive. It is used in many Asian, South American, and Central American dishes. It is also known as Chinese parsley.





### ◀ Dill ▶

Dill leaves have a feathery shape with a strong aroma and a tart flavor. Dill is used to flavor sauces and stews (especially in Central and Eastern European dishes). Dill seeds are flat, oval, and brown, with a caraway-like flavor. Dill pickles are flavored with dill seeds.

### ▶ Lemongrass ▶

Lemongrass is a tropical grass with a long greenish stalk and serrated leaves. The inner stalks have a strong lemony flavor and aroma. Lemongrass is widely used in Asian dishes.



### ▶ Mint ▶

Almost everyone has tasted mint at some point. The leaves are typically textured and deep green. Different varieties of mint, such as spearmint or peppermint, have different flavors and aromas. Mint is used by many cuisines for both sweet and savory dishes.



### ▶ Marjoram ▶

Marjoram (MAHR-juhr-uhm) is a member of the mint family. It has short, oval, pale green leaves, a sweet flavor, and a strong aroma. It's most commonly used in Mediterranean dishes.



### ▶ Oregano ▶

Oregano (oh-REHG-uh-no) has small oval leaves with a pungent, peppery taste. Widely used in Italian and Greek dishes, the stems and leaves are used to flavor fish, meats, poultry, and tomatoes. Marjoram is similar in appearance and aroma to oregano, although it is milder.



### ▶ Parsley ▶

Parsley may have curly leaves with ruffled edges or flat leaves with scalloped edges. Flat-leaf parsley (shown here) is also known as Italian parsley and has a spicy flavor with a bit of licorice. Leaves and whole stems of parsley are often added to simmered dishes. The leaves may be added as a final flavoring ingredient or used in sprigs as a garnish.



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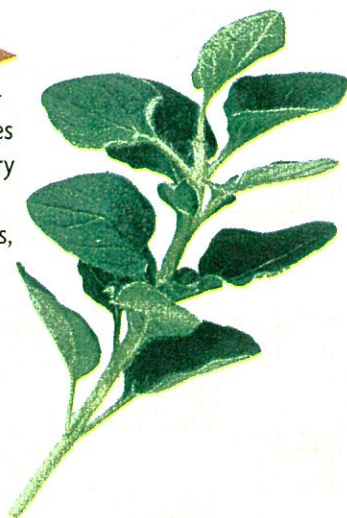
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# Herbs



## ▲ Rosemary

Rosemary has needle-shaped leaves. It has a pungent, resinous flavor, similar to pine needles. Rosemary stems, also known as branches, are sometimes used as skewers for grilled or broiled foods. Dried rosemary is almost as pungent as fresh rosemary.



## ▲ Sage

Fresh sage leaves are oval and are covered with soft threads, giving the leaf a silvery, furry appearance. It has a pungent, slightly bitter, musty mint flavor and is often added whole to stews and soups. It is also used to flavor roast meats or poultry. Dried sage is often referred to as rubbed sage.

## ▶ Savory

Savory has small, narrow, gray-green leaves and a bitter, pungent flavor that resembles thyme and rosemary. It is available fresh and dried.



## ▶ Thyme

Thyme (TIME) has very small gray-green oval leaves. It has a lemony, minty flavor with overtones of rosemary. Some varieties have special flavors such as nutmeg, mint, or lemon. Thyme is used to flavor soups and stews. Whole sprigs or chopped leaves may be used. Dried thyme retains much of the flavor of fresh thyme and is widely available.



## ▶ Tarragon

Tarragon (TAHR-uh-gon) has narrow, pointed, dark green leaves with a strong licorice flavor. The stems are often added as a flavoring for simmered dishes and sauces. The leaves are typically chopped before they are added as a final flavoring ingredient. Tarragon is often used with chicken, fish, veal, and egg dishes. It is typical in many French-style dishes. Although dried tarragon does not have as strong a flavor as fresh tarragon, it has a potent aroma.



What are herbs? Give five examples.