

**JAZZ UP YOUR MENU – GROW AND USE HERBS  
BARBARA PORSCH – PERMIAN BASIN MASTER GARDENER**

**REMEMBER** in using herbs, one (1) teaspoon of dried equals three (3) teaspoons fresh.

**MAKE HERBAL OIL CONCENTRATE** to store in the refrigerator for several weeks or in the freezer for long term. Use this as a substitute for fresh herbs in sauces, soups, salad dressings, basting mixtures, vegetables or in sour cream or yogurt for quick sauces. One teaspoon of this concentrate is equal to 3 teaspoons fresh herbs.

Use two cups (hard packed) herb leaves and tender stems. You can use a single herb or a combination. Experiment. If you don't have enough of a particular herb, use parsley to make the measurement. Add 1/2 cup good vegetable oil (not olive oil) and combine in the blender or processor, using pulse. You may have to stop and push down the material. The processor creates a mixture with more texture while the blender will puree. Store in airtight container. Glass mason jar is great. If you are going to freeze it, use plastic ice cube trays. When frozen, pop loose and store in zipper freezer bag.

**MAKE HERBAL VINEGARS:** In clean jars, cover fresh herbs and/or spices with room temperature vinegar. Let cure in cool dark place for several weeks, then strain through coffee filter into clean decorative jar. Here are a few examples:

**Onion – Garlic – Mint- Lemon:** Fill quart jar 2/3 full with combination of: lemon balm, lemon basil, lemon thyme, lemon verbena or root stalks of lemon grass (sliced and slightly crushed). Add peeled zest of 2 or 3 lemons. Fill jar with vinegar and let cure for 2 weeks. When you strain into decorative jar, add a fresh spiral of lemon peel to each bottle. Excellent for marinades for chicken or fish and on cooked or raw vegetables or salad dressings.

**Chile:** Use a jar with a shaker top and fill about 2/3 full with small dried red hot chile (like pequin or super chile). Fill with white vinegar. You may add a clove of peeled garlic and a few peppercorns. This is ready in a week or so, and is essential in the South with greens or beans. As you use it up, you may add more vinegar.

**MAKE HERBAL OILS**

**Chile oil:** Heat 2 cups vegetable oil and add 1/3 to 1/2 cup crushed chile with seeds. Use cayenne, tabasco, or for REALLY HOT oil, use habanero. Heat slowly until oil is hot, but not smoking. Let cool completely and then store in jar with tight lid. After 2 weeks, strain through coffee filter into clean jar. Add 1 whole dried chile for identification. Use to saute meats and fish, or for spicy dressings or marinades. Use in stir fry.

**Pesto oil:** This is a four star recipe. Better than what they serve at restaurants to dip bread in.

- 1/2 cup packed fresh basil leaves (can even use tender stems)
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 cup vegetable or olive oil.

Preheat oven to 300. Combine ingredients in small pyrex or metal bowl. (anything that is oven proof) Set on baking sheet and cook in lower third of oven for 1 hour. Cool. Strain into a glass jar. Refrigerate to keep. Serve in saucer at room temperature with freshly cracked black pepper.

Excellent on pastas or vinaigrettes, but unbelievable on mashed potatoes. This is a good way to use up basil at the end of the season. When I do it, I usually use my roaster and multiply the recipe to use 6 cups oil. You can store it back in the oil containers. Great for gifting.

(Try it once with vegetable oil and another time with olive oil to see which you prefer. It will be different because of the flavor of the olive oil.)

## **MAKE HERBAL TEAS**

Experiment starting with lemon verbena, mint, or lemon thyme. Wash 1 cup fresh herb leaves and put into teapot. Add 1 quart of boiling water, cover and let steep at least 3 minutes before serving. The measurements of the herbs are flexible. Depending on the freshness and strength of the herbs, you may need to add or subtract.

**MAKE HERBAL SUGARS OR SPIKED SUGARS** to use in baking or in tea. Put herb leaves and sugar into food processor and whirl until the sugar turns green and there is no sign of a leaf. Lemon Verbena is excellent as is Chocolate Mint. Use it in baking also, such as sugar cookies.

## **MAKE HERBAL BUTTERS**

### **Regal Rosemary Butter**

1 stick softened butter or oleo  
3 tsp fresh rosemary leaves, removed from stem, minced  
1 Tblsp orange juice, or lemon juice or white wine  
salt and pepper to taste  
Good on steak, lamb, fish, chicken, potatoes and other vegetables

3 cloves garlic pressed  
1/2 tsp orange or lemon zest,  
minced  
1/4 tsp cayenne

**MAKE HERBAL JELLIES** Favorites are lemon scented like lemon verbena, basils especially African blue or purple leafed basils. To make herbal jelly, gather about 2 cups of your favorite fresh herb leaves. Wash and drain them. Then chop coarsely and put in a medium saucepan. Use bottom of a glass to crush and macerate the leaves. Add 2 cups water and bring to a boil. Boil for just 10 seconds. Remove from heat, cover and let sit for 15 minutes to release the leaves flavor.

Strain 1 1/2 cups of this liquid and pour through the strainer again into another large, deep saucepan (I use a dutch oven) Add 2 Tablespoons plain unseasoned rice vinegar (or regular distilled), a pinch of salt and 3 1/2 cups granulated sugar. Bring the mixture to a hard boil, stirring constantly. When the boil can't be stirred down, add 3 ounces of liquid pectin. (Certo brand comes in premeasured foil packets.) Return to a hard boil that can't be stirred down and boil for exactly one minute. Then remove from heat.

Skim off any foam and pour the hot jelly into 6 hot sterilized 1/2 pint jelly jars leaving approximately 1/2 inch head space. Clean any drips from the rim of the jar and seal at once with sterilized 2 piece canning lids.

This is excellent with cream cheese and crackers or to flavor fish or chicken breasts.

## **MAKE PESTOS**

### **Basic Pesto**

1/2 cup vegetable oil or good olive oil  
2 or more cloves garlic, minced  
2 cups (hard packed) fresh basil leaves  
1 cup (hard packed) fresh parsley (preferably flat leaf Italian Parsley)  
1/4 cup pine nuts or sliced almonds  
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan (NOT out of a can)

Combine well in processor, adding cheese last. Freeze if keeping more than 2 weeks or so. A perfect size is to freeze in cup cake tin using paper liners. When frozen, take out and store in zipper freezer bag. This amount is just perfect for a lot of dishes. When storing in refrigerator, put into glass jar and smooth top. Then pour a very thin layer of oil over the top. This prevents discoloration.

### **Spinach Pesto Spread**

3 cups (packed) fresh spinach leaves (about 5 oz)      1 cup (packed) fresh basil leaves  
4 ½ Tblsp fresh lemon juice      3 Tblsp capers with juices  
1 cup shelled unsalted pumpkin seeds (or sliced almonds)      1 Tblsp chopped fresh garlic  
2 Tblsp chopped shallots      1 Tblsp Dijon mustard  
1 ½ cups vegetable oil.

Process leaves, juice & capers coarsely. Add remaining ingredients except oil. Process finely. Gradually add oil while processor is running. Add salt & pepper to taste. Allow to flavor several hours before serving. Serve with thinly sliced baguettes. This is always a big hit at a party. Also good on grilled chicken, baked potatoes or use as a sauce on a pizza with left over chicken and mozzarella. It also freezes well like the basic pesto.

### **OTHER GOODIES:**

#### **Lemon Basil Chicken Salad from Paula Deen**

4 cups diced cooked chicken      1 rib minced celery  
¼ cup chopped fresh basil leaves      ¼ cup sliced almonds  
½ cup sour cream      ½ cup mayonnaise  
1 ½ teaspoons fresh lemon juice      salt and pepper

In a medium bowl, combine chicken, celery, basil and almonds. In small bowl, combine sour cream, mayo, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Add to chicken mixture, tossing gently to coat. Cover and chill.

#### **Central Market Tarragon Chicken Salad**

Use same recipe as above, substituting 2 Tablespoons fresh tarragon for the basil and adding seedless red grapes cut in half. (This is basically a Barefoot Contessa recipe. She uses roasted chicken so a deli chicken is easy and great.)

#### **Creamy Cilantro Potato Bisque**

6 cups chicken broth  
2 or 3 white rose potatoes (about 2 pounds) peeled and coarsely chopped  
¼ teaspoon white pepper  
½ heaping teaspoon ground cumin  
1 can (7 oz) chopped green chile  
1 cup lightly packed fresh cilantro sprigs (no stems)  
4 green onions, thinly sliced, including tops  
1 cup sour cream  
Salt to taste (depending on whether you use canned broth or homemade)

In large saucepan or dutch oven, combine broth, potatoes, pepper and cumin. Bring to boil and reduce heat. Cover and boil gently until potatoes are very tender when pierced, about 15 to 20 minutes. Let potatoes cool. In processor or blender, combine half of potato mixture with chiles, cilantro and onion. Whirl until smooth. Transfer to another container. Puree remaining potato mixture and sour cream. Combine pureed mixtures and salt to taste. If you have an immersion blender, use it to eliminate transferring to another container.

This can be served warm, or chill and served cold.

