

It's All About the Flavor Using Herbs and Spices in School Nutrition

WHY Herbs and Spices?

Using flavor enhancers like herbs and spices helps us more easily create more flavorful foods without relying on salt. Herbs and spices can also add visual appeal to food presentations and they can help us add variety to our menus by taking a base recipe like vegetable soup and changing the flavor profile to, for example, Italian or Latin by simply adding corresponding herbs and spices.

What are herbs and spices?

For the most part, herbs come from the leaves and stems of plants where spices are usually the seeds of plants. A great example is cilantro. The leaves are an herb we know as cilantro and the seeds of this plant are a spice we know as coriander.

Fresh versus dried? What's the difference?

Most spices only come dried. Herbs can be purchased either fresh or dried.

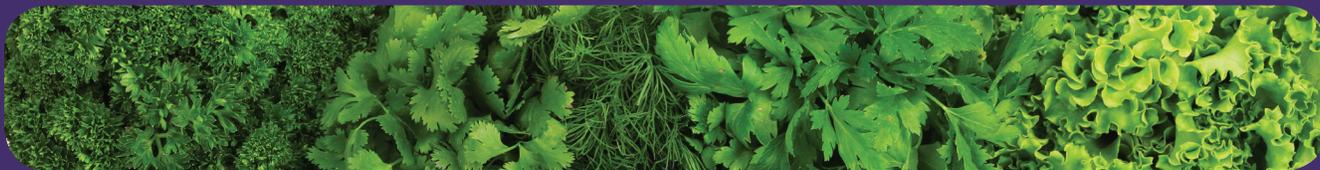
How do I store my herbs and spices?

Fresh Herbs

Roll fresh herbs into dampened paper towels and place the herbs in zipper storage bags under refrigeration. If your refrigeration system cools unevenly (i.e. items at the top of the cooler system freeze), store your herbs on lower shelves to protect them from temperature extremes. Make sure the paper towels that are rolled around the herbs stay damp.

Dried Herbs and Spices

Dried herbs and spices should be stored in airtight containers away from heat and bright lights. Heat and light can cause the volatile oils in the herbs and spices to dissipate quickly. Most herbs and spices have a shelf-life of about a year, but you should “nose-check” them regularly: if they don't have a distinct smell, it's time to get rid of them!





Herb and Spice Flavor Combination Cheat Sheet

Ideas by Flavor

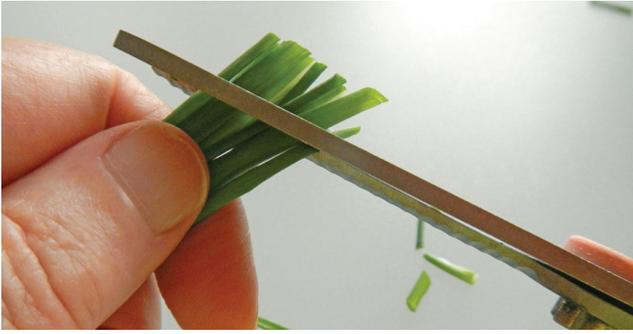
Ideas by Flavor	Herbs and Spices
Italian	Basil, Oregano, Thyme, Rosemary, Garlic, Chili Flakes, Parsley
Latin	Cilantro, Oregano, Chili Powder, Chili Flakes, Cumin
Asian	Garlic, Ginger, Cilantro, Chili Flakes
Indian	Garlic, Ginger, Coriander, Chili Flakes, Chili Powder
French	Rosemary, Thyme, Coriander, Dill, Parsley
Mediterranean	Parsley, Dill, Mint, Oregano, Basil, Paprika, Chives

Ideas by Food

Ideas by Food	Herbs and Spices
Eggs	Dill, Paprika, Parsley
Peas	Dill, Parsley, Mint
Potatoes	Dill, Parsley, Chili Flakes, Rosemary, Thyme, Chives
Corn	Garlic, Cilantro, Chili Flakes, Chili Powder,
Beans	Garlic, Cilantro, Chili Flakes, Chili Powder, Parsley, Cumin, Basil, Oregano, Thyme, Rosemary
Carrots	Coriander, Dill, Thyme, Rosemary, Ginger
Meats	Rosemary, Thyme, Oregano, Coriander, Chili Powder
Poultry	Rosemary, Thyme, Basil, Oregano, Chili Powder, Parsley, Cilantro
Fish	Dill, Thyme, Coriander, Parsley, Paprika
Sweet Potatoes	Ginger, Paprika, Chili Powder, Parsley, Mint



Use These Techniques for Chopping Herbs



Photos: Alice Henneman, UNL Extension in Lancaster County

Chives:

- Quickly snip small bundles of chives with a kitchen scissors OR
- Cut bundles on a cutting board with a very sharp chef's knife



Cilantro, parsley and other small-leaved delicate herbs:

- Remove leaves (OK to include some tender stems)
- Bunch on cutting board
- Place fingertips on tip of a chef's knife and rock blade briefly back and forth. Re-gather leaves and chop again if a smaller size is desired.



Thyme, oregano, rosemary, tarragon and other sturdy stemmed, small-leaved herbs:

- Hold thumb and index finger together; run down the stem in the opposite direction the leaves have grown.
- Chop the same as other herbs, if desired.

Basil, mint, sage and other large, leafy herbs – a technique called “chiffonade” can be used:



- Stack 5 or 6 leaves, and roll tightly



- Cut crosswise



- This method cuts herbs into narrow ribbons

Info from Fresh Herbs: a Picture of Healthy Eating
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 Joanne Kinsey, MS, Rutgers Cooperative Extension
 Rutgers University