



Lewis County

Master Food Preservers

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

Food Safety and  
Preservation



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## **PRESERVE YOUR HERBS**

**FREEZING:** is the quickest and easiest method to preserve herbs. Just gather the fresh sprigs of parsley, oregano or dill weed and wash them. Package the sprigs in small plastic bags and freeze them.

**DRYING FRESH HERBS:** Drying is the easiest method of preserving herbs. You simply expose the leaves, flowers, or seeds, to warm, dry air until the moisture is gone. The best time to harvest most herbs for drying is when the flowers first open. Ones having long stems such as: marjoram, sage, savory, mint, and rosemary can be dried in bunches. Cut long branches and rinse in cool water, discarding any leaves that are dead or have lost their color. Tie the ends of the stems together into small bunches and hang them upside down in a warm, dry room where they won't be exposed to direct sunlight. A warm, even temperature is best. Air should circulate freely around the drying herbs to absorb their moisture without destroying their oils, so don't hang them against a wall. If you dry herbs outside, bring them inside at night so the dew won't dampen them. Do avoid collecting dust on the drying herbs. Place each bunch inside a paper bag, gathering the top and tying the stem ends so that the herb leaves hang freely inside the bag. Cut out the bottom of the bag or punch air holes in the sides for ventilation. After a week or two, the herbs should be cracking dry. Carefully remove the leaves without breaking them; then store in sealed containers.

**TRAY DRYING:** Best for seeds, such large-leaved herbs as basil, and short-tipped stems that are difficult to tie together for hanging. You can either remove the leaves from their stems or leave them attached, but spread only one layer of leaves on each tray. If you attempt to dry too many at once, air will not reach them evenly, and they will take longer to cure. The trays can be made to any size, using window screening or cheesecloth for the drying deck. Every few days, stir or turn the leaves gently to assure even, thorough drying. It should take a week or so for them to dry completely, depending on the temperature and humidity. When leaves are crisp and thoroughly dry, take off racks. Seeds can be spread on the trays or screens in a thin layer and dried in the same way as leaves. When dried, carefully rub seed capsules through your hands, blowing away chaff.

**MICROWAVE OVENS:** New and faster way to dry herbs. Rinse the herbs as for bunch or tray drying, shaking off excess moisture. Put no more than 4 or 5 herb branches in the oven between two paper towels. Turn on oven for 2-3 minutes, remove from oven and place herbs on a rack. If not brittle and dry when removed from oven, repeat microwave drying 30 seconds more. Then store as for regular dried herbs.

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**HERB BUTTERS:** A good way to use herbs, particularly small quantities grown indoors. Cream butter or margarine with fresh or dried, minced herbs. Use and refrigerate overnight for best flavor. Chive butter is particularly good on a French bread with steaks, and oregano butter is great with Italian dinners.

**HERB SALTS:** Another tasty and unusual way to use small quantities of herbs grown inside. Put a layer of non-iodized salt on a cookie sheet. Wash and pat the fresh herb leaves dry and lay them on the salt, sprinkle on another layer of salt. Put the sheet in the oven at moderate heat or about 10 minutes. After heating, stir the salt and herbs carefully, breaking any clumps of salt with a wooden spoon. Spread the salt over the herbs again and put them in the oven for another 10 minutes or until the herbs are crisp enough to crumble. Use the herb salt as you would regular salt.