

# Drying Herbs 101



*Sacramento County Master Food Preserver*



**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**  
Agriculture and Natural Resources

UC Master Food Preserver Program

# Drying Herb Flavor Factor

- Leaves & seeds of herbs
- Oils in the cell walls of the plants
- Drying temperature
- Storing for best flavor



## Harvesting Herbs

- Best time –
  - Just before the flowers first open
  - Gather in early morning
  - Rinse herbs in cool water and gentle shake
  - Label the herbs to be dried when picked



# Drying Herbs



- Keep the temperature below 100 degrees.
  - High temperatures will cause flavor loss.
- Preheat dehydrator to 90 – 100 degrees.
  - Dry 1 -3 hours or until herbs are dry and crumble easily.
- Dehydrator
  - Dry quickly
  - High quality herbs.
  - Place herbs on trays covered with a fine screen to catch the dried leaves if they fall from the stems.



# Microwave Drying

- Fast
- Dry 1-2 cups at a time
  - Layer between two sheets of white paper towel.
- **NOTE:** Do not use recycled paper towel, they often contain scraps of metal that can arc and catch on fire
- Stir herbs every 30 seconds
- Best herbs for this method
  - parsley, celery leaves, chives, thyme and sage
- Check your owner's manual



# Air Drying – Hardy Herbs



- Hardy Herbs
  - – sage, thyme, rosemary, summer savory, and parsley
- Tied into small bundles and air dried
- Drying herbs outdoors
- Drying herbs indoors



# Air Drying -Tender Leaf Herbs

- Tender-Leaf Herbs
  - Basil, tarragon, lemon balm, mints
- Brown Bag Method
  - Tie herbs together
  - Hang inside a paper bag
  - Cut vents in bag top and sides
  - Close the top with a rubber band
  - Place in an area that is warm
    - air will circulate through the bag
- Paper Towel Method
  - Placed on a layer of paper towels on a tray to dry
  - Take 5-10 days to air dry.
  - Method will dry the leaves flat and they will retain their color



\* Advantage, any leaves and seeds will be caught in the bottom of the bag



# Test for Dryness



- Dry when herbs crumble easily between the fingers
- Stems should be brittle and break when bent
- Leaves and seeds should fall from the stems.
- Dried leaves can be left whole and crumbled as needed or they can be coarsely crumbled before storing

# Storage

- **Checking for Moisture before Storage**

- Place in tightly sealed jars in a warm place for about 1 week

- Check the jars regular for moisture

- If moisture appears on the inside of the glass or under the lid, remove contents for further drying

\* Moisture not removed high a chance of mold growth



- Place dried herbs in an airtight container, store in a cool, dark, dry location
- Best flavor use within six months to one year
- Wait to crush or grind herbs/seeds for storage for best aroma and flavor just before using
- Whole seeds and leaves have the longest shelf life; ground has the shortest



# Using Herbs in Foods



- Adding to cooked foods, add during the last part of the cooking time to get the most flavor
- Adding to uncooked foods such as salad dressing, dips and spreads will need time to blend flavors, add them as far in advance of serving as possible
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon powdered or ground herb = 1 teaspoon crumbled dried herb = 1 tablespoon chopped, fresh herb



# Sources

- Oregon State University Master Food Preserver Program
- University of CA Cooperative Extension's Dried Herbs publication
- University of Vermont Drying Garden Herbs publication
- Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension's Culinary Herbs publication
- San Joaquin County Master Food Preserver *Trish Tremayne*

