



## Too many fresh herbs? Here's how to preserve them



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*I love all the fresh herbs available, but I often find myself with more than I need. How can I save them? - Alice, Arroyo Grande.*

Whether enjoying herbs from our garden, farmers market or grocer, it's easy to find ourselves with too much of these lovely plants that enhance our cuisine. Fortunately, fresh herbs are easily preserved for future use by several safe, tested methods by either drying or freezing.

Before freezing or drying, you should *prepare* your herbs. Cut sprigs with scissors (leave the plant at least 4-6 inches tall, allowing for regrowth). Harvest in the morning, after dewfall has evaporated but before the day becomes hot. Strongest flavor is found in new leaves, peaking before flowers open. Inspect and discard leaves/stems showing bruising, discoloration, or insect damage. Gently wash sprigs in cool running water, shaking off excess, and drain on paper toweling removing more moisture.

Drying is easiest for non-tender herbs like thyme, sage, rosemary. Herbs with high-moisture content - like basil, mints, tarragon, and lemon balm - can mold if dried too slowly. Dry your prepared herbs by tying bundles of sprigs and hanging in a dust-free, low-humidity area with good air circulation. Small leaved herbs can be laid out on fine mesh screening of stainless steel or food grade plastic. Herbs are dry when the leaves are crispy and crumble easily with your fingers. Treat dried herbs "to destroy insects or insect eggs by heating the herbs at 160 ° F for 30 minutes or

freeze at 0 ° F or lower at least 48 hours” according to *Penn State University Extension*. Store them in airtight containers away from heat and light. They can keep up to a year. Here’s a handy conversion: *1 tablespoon fresh herb =1 teaspoon dried herb =1/4 teaspoon powdered herb*.

Fresh herbs can be frozen. Lay the prepared sprigs on a cookie sheet. Freeze completely, then store frozen in airtight containers. Dice prepared herbs, pack in ice cube trays and fill with water. Freeze solid, transfer cubes into airtight containers and store frozen. This works well for soups and stews.

For more information – including a microwave method – see *Preserving Herbs by Freezing or Drying*, *University of Minnesota Extension*: <https://extension.umn.edu>

Reach out to the **Master Food Preserver Helpline** for assistance on food preservation questions: email [slomfp@ucanr.edu](mailto:slomfp@ucanr.edu) or call 805-781-1429.

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