

Green Goddess Dip

Redolent of fresh herbs, this dip is inspired by the classic green goddess salad dressing.

In a blender or food processor, combine the chives, parsley, tarragon, basil, mint, anchovies, shallot, lemon juice and mayonnaise. Blend or process until smooth, about 1 minute or about 15 pulses.

Transfer the mixture to a bowl and stir in the sour cream. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to 3 days. Serve with potato chips and crudités for dipping. Makes about 1½ cups.

Williams-Sonoma Kitchen

Pan-Roasted Chicken with Herb Compound Butter

Butter combined with herbs and other seasonings, known as a compound butter, is a simple way to enhance the flavor of foods, such as roasted chicken breasts.

Preheat an oven to 400°F.

Season the chicken breasts generously on both sides with salt and pepper. In a large ovenproof fry pan over medium-high heat, warm the olive oil. Place 2 of the chicken breasts, skin side down, in the pan and sear until browned and crisp, about 6 minutes. Transfer to a plate. Sear the remaining 2 chicken breasts, then turn them so they are skin side up. Return the other breasts, skin side up, to the pan and transfer to the oven. Roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of a breast, away from the bone, registers 160°F, 22 to 24 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl, stir together the butter, parsley, chives and shallot until well combined. Season with salt and pepper. Set the compound butter aside.

Transfer the chicken to a cutting board, cover loosely with aluminum foil and let rest for 5 minutes. Leave the chicken breasts whole or cut into slices, if desired. Top each breast with 1 Tbs. of the compound butter and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Williams-Sonoma Kitchen

Salsa Verde

This delicious green salsa goes well with tortilla chips and most grilled meat.

Quarter and seed the chilies; for a spicier salsa, leave in a few seeds. Husk and quarter the tomatillos. Pick the leaves and tender stems off of the cilantro and parsley.

In a food processor, combine the chilies, tomatillos, cilantro leaves and stems, parsley leaves and stems, the onion, garlic, the 1 Tbs. salt, the 1 Tbs. pepper and the 2 Tbs. lime juice. Pulse several times until combined but still fairly chunky. Stir in the grapeseed oil. Adjust the seasonings with salt, pepper and lime juice; the salsa should be vibrant green in color. Serve immediately, or tightly cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days. Makes 2 cups.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *On the Grill*, by Willie Cooper (Oxmoor House, 2009).

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All About Herbs

Herb or Spice?

Although the two are used for similar purposes, herbs and spices actually refer to distinct categories of seasonings. Herbs are the fragrant leaves and tender stems of green plants, having an almost floral bouquet and more delicate flavors.

Spices, on the other hand, generally come from woody plants, many of them native to the world's tropical regions. Most familiar in their dried forms, spices can be taken from the rhizomes, stems, buds, seeds or bark of the plants, where concentrated amounts of their complex aromatic components result in significantly stronger flavors. Cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger and clove all display the intense aromatic qualities of spices.

Selecting

Choose fresh herbs that look bright, fragrant and healthy. Avoid those with wilted, yellowed or blackened leaves or moldy stems. Herbs may be packaged in plastic bags or thin plastic containers or simply gathered with rubber bands. Young, tender hothouse herbs make delicate garnishes but have less flavor than larger, hardier field-grown herbs. Although herbs with blossoms make attractive edible garnishes, leaves picked from plants without buds or flowers will have more flavor.

When buying dried herbs, purchase small amounts from a reputable specialty market that sells them in bulk with a high turnover, or choose small glass jars containing large bright green flakes. A higher-priced brand usually ensures better quality.

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Technique Class: Cooking with Herbs

An Italian roast lacking rosemary, a Thai salad in need of cilantro, Scandinavian gravlax missing dill, Lebanese tabbouleh minus mint—without fresh and fragrant herbs, cuisines around the world would lose their heart and soul.

As immigrants share their traditional dishes and as travelers explore the tables of distant countries, cooks everywhere are discovering the power of herbs. Grocery stores now offer an ever-expanding selection of fresh herbs. Alongside curly parsley appear bouquet-like bunches of delicate chervil, heady oregano, velvety sage and perhaps three different varieties of thyme.

Glossary of Commonly Used Herbs

Basil: Used in kitchens throughout the Mediterranean and in Southeast Asia, basil tastes faintly of anise and cloves. Many different varieties are available, including common green Italian basil and reddish-purple Thai basil.

Bay: These elongated gray-green leaves are used to flavor sauces, soups, stews and braises, imparting a slightly sweet, citrusy, nutty flavor. Remove bay leaves from a dish before serving. Fresh bay leaves can occasionally be found in your market but you're more likely to find them dried in the spice aisle.

Chive: These long, thin, dark green members of the onion family lend color and a mild flavor to savory dishes and are often used to give an onionlike flavor without the bite. The slender, hollow leaves can be snipped with a pair of kitchen shears.

Cilantro: Used extensively in Mexican, Asian and Latin American cuisines, this fresh green herb has a distinctive, slightly soapy flavor and a pungent scent. Also known as Chinese parsley or fresh coriander, cilantro loses its pungency quickly when cooked, so add it at the end of cooking or use it raw.

Dill: Fine and feathery and with a distinct aromatic flavor, dill is often used in savory preparations and in the making of pickles.

Lavender: The flowering lavender plant with its highly perfumed blossoms, leaves and stalks grows wild in southern France, where it is a signature seasoning. Use sparingly to flavor lamb or poultry, or infuse syrups for use in dessert making.

Marjoram: Fresh marjoram has a delicate floral taste that enhances many Italian dishes, especially ones that include tomatoes. Marjoram is a cousin to oregano, which is sometimes called wild marjoram, but its flavor is more subtle than oregano's.

Mint: The mint family includes hundreds of species, but the variety most commonly used in the kitchen is spearmint. Its lively aroma adds complexity to salsas and sauces. Mint can also be combined with other herbs in rubs and marinades.

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All About Herbs (Continued)

Storing

Wrap fresh herbs in damp paper towels, then wrap in a plastic bag and refrigerate for 3 to 5 days. Take care with fragile herbs, such as chives and basil, for they bruise and discolor easily. To keep long-stemmed herbs, such as parsley, basil and cilantro, for up to 10 days, trim off the ends of their stems, remove any yellowed leaves and place the bunch in a container of water, like a bouquet of flowers. Drape a bag loosely upside down over the leaves, secure with a rubber band around the mouth of the jar and refrigerate. Remove sprigs as needed.

To prepare a large amount of herbs in advance with little loss of flavor, chop them up to 24 hours ahead. Then, place them in an airtight container, cover them with a damp paper towel, seal the lid and refrigerate.

Store dried herbs in airtight containers away from both light and heat. Buy in small amounts, replacing them after 4 to 6 months, as they fade in color, fragrance and flavor. Although cork tops and prominently displayed racks add decorative touches to your kitchen, they only allow herbs to lose their flavor more quickly.

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Oregano: This aromatic, pungent and spicy herb, also known as wild marjoram, is used fresh or dried as a seasoning for a host of savory dishes. Mexican oregano has a flavor distinct from other varieties and is worth seeking out for Mexican recipes.

Parsley: Two types of parsley are commonly available: curly-leaf and flat-leaf, or Italian, parsley. The curly variety was most often used to garnish plates in the United States. Flat-leaf parsley is preferred for cooking because of its clean, fresh taste.

Rosemary: A Mediterranean herb, rosemary looks like pine needles on a woody stick. This herb's assertive flavor pairs well with lamb, many vegetables and seafood, but it should be used in moderation. If using dried rosemary, finely crumble it before adding it to a dish.

Sage: A perennial that grows profusely in Italy, sage has aromatic, soft, gray-green leaves. In Roman times, this pungent herb was valued for its medicinal properties. Today, its chief use is in the kitchen to season poultry, veal, pork and other dishes.

Tarragon: This mildly sweet herb has long, narrow, deep green leaves and a taste reminiscent of anise. Take care when adding tarragon, as its relatively strong flavor can overpower delicate ingredients. Tarragon complements vegetables, fish, chicken and egg dishes especially well.

Thyme: One of the most important culinary herbs of Europe, thyme delivers a floral, earthy flavor to all types of food, including vegetables (especially roots and tubers) and poultry. One variety, lemon thyme, adds a subtle citrus note and is excellent for seasoning seafood.

Creative Herb Ideas

Cooks around the world use fresh herbs to season a variety of dishes. Whether simmered in a simple broth, stirred into a sauce or sprinkled over fruit, herbs enliven foods with their aroma and infuse them with their distinct flavors. Here are some creative ways to perk up meals with fresh herbs.

Herb Pesto: In Italian, pesto means “pounded.” Purists make pesto by hand with a mortar and pestle, but this method takes a lot of time and patience. For a faster alternative, prepare herb pesto in a food processor. The most popular pesto is the Italian blend of basil, pine nuts, extra-virgin olive oil and Parmesan cheese, but other combinations of herbs can yield a delicious pesto.

Compound Butter: Compound butter is a mixture chopped fresh herb and softened butter. A small pat of this flavored butter adds inimitable flavor and moisture as it melts on beef, chicken, pork and fish.

Chimichurri: A savory condiment of Argentina, chimichurri plays a culinary role similar to that of ketchup in the United States. There are many versions of chimichurri, but the primary ingredients are always fresh herbs, spicy chili, oil and vinegar, with a texture ranging from smooth to salsalike. This piquant sauce is delicious paired with grilled steak.

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Gremolata: A simple herb and citrus relish called gremolata provides a welcome counterpoint to rich and hearty dishes like braised meats. Traditionally made with chopped parsley, lemon zest and garlic, gremolata can be prepared with almost any fresh herb and citrus. Serve it atop osso buco, veal cutlets or even white bean soup.

Brush on Flavor: When you want just a hint of herbal flavor, use fresh sprigs as a basting brush. A sturdy herb like rosemary is excellent for slathering a tangy sauce onto barbecued chicken.

Simple Syrups: Infusing simple syrup with fresh herbs is a great way to add a new dimension to beverages. Combine equal parts sugar and water and heat just until the sugar dissolves. Remove from the heat and stir in a handful of your favorite herbs, then let steep for 2 hours before straining. Try rosemary syrup in fresh lemonade or lavender syrup in a glass of Champagne.

Bouquet Garni: A bouquet garni imparts subtle herbal flavor to soups and stews. Rinse and wring out a 10-inch square of cheesecloth. Spread out the damp cheesecloth on a work surface and place the herbs or spices in the middle. Bring the four corners of the cheesecloth together and tie them with a length of kitchen string, forming a secure bundle with no gaps. Use the bouquet garni as directed in your recipe.

Toss in Salads: Fresh herbs are used as primary salad ingredients in many Mediterranean countries, where they are appreciated for their complex flavor and refreshing taste.

Add Fresh Herbs Last: The flavor of fresh herbs fades quickly when heated, so add them to the pan at the last minute. Alternatively, sprinkle them on top of the finished dish at the end of cooking.

Tabbouleh

Eat tabbouleh as the Lebanese do, scooping it up with romaine leaves instead of a fork. Alternatively, capture mouthfuls with wedges of pita bread. Tabbouleh is best when made at least 1 day in advance of serving so that the flavors have time to develop.

Place the bulgur on the bottom of a large salad bowl. In a small bowl, whisk together the 1 cup lemon juice, the olive oil and garlic and drizzle over the bulgur. In the following order, layer the green onions, parsley, mint, tomatoes and cucumber on top of the bulgur. Season the top layer with 1½ tsp. of the salt and the ¼ tsp. pepper and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 24 hours or up to 48 hours.

Bring to room temperature and toss together. Taste and season with the remaining 1 tsp. salt and more lemon juice, if needed. Serve with the romaine leaves or warmed pita bread. Serves 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Lifestyles Series, *Small Plates*, by Joanne Weir (Time-Life Books, 1998).

Ingredients for Tabbouleh

¾ cup medium-fine bulgur

1 cup fresh lemon juice, or as needed

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

5 garlic cloves, minced

8 green onions, including tender green portions, diced

1 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

⅓ cup chopped fresh mint

4 large, ripe tomatoes, diced

1 English (hothouse) cucumber, peeled, halved, seeded and diced

2½ tsp. salt

¼ tsp. freshly ground pepper

1 head romaine lettuce, leaves separated, or 3 pita bread rounds, heated and cut into wedges