

Herbs for Winter  
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Winter is just around the corner, and the ability to go into the garden to get fresh herbs for cooking will be gone. Several methods can be used to preserve the last of the fresh herbs before the first frost spoils them.

Drying is the traditional method for preserving herbs. Chervil, chives, dill, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon and thyme are all herbs that dry well. Gather the young, tender leaves for the most flavor and aroma. Wash them thoroughly, remove excess water and dry in a single layer on a drying rack, or bundle stems and hang in a dry, airy place.

Freezing herbs produces the freshest flavor. Rosemary, dill, thyme and tarragon freeze well on the stalk. Wash the herbs and spin dry. Cut them into bag size pieces, place them in a freezer bag and label. To use, just snip off what is needed.

A bouquet garni of 3-4 sprigs of parsley, two sprigs of thyme and half a bay leaf can be tied together with kitchen twine. Lay the bundles on parchment paper and freeze. The frozen bundle will be ready to wrap in cheese cloth and drop right into a soup or sauce.

Leafy herbs like basil, parsley, and oregano are easily frozen after chopping. Wash and spin dry, remove stems and chop coarsely. Pack in small freezer containers. While the leaves will stick together, they are easily broken off with a spoon to retrieve what is needed for a dish.

Fresh herbs can also be made into a pesto and frozen in ice cube trays. The individual cubes are convenient servings and will keep for six months in the freezer. There isn't any specific UCCE recommended recipes for pesto; use your favorites. Maintain clean hands and surfaces during preparation and freezing.

Herbs also give vinegars and jellies a savory twist. There are unique combinations that make great gifts for the holidays. As always, find reliable recipes with detailed instructions. Safe sources would be major universities, major producers of canning products, and the Master Food Preservers website. Canning recipes are abundant, and a surprising number of them do not use safe canning principles.

Spending some time now will provide the reward of an additional sublime layer of flavors in your winter dishes, and provide a reminder of warm summer days.

Do you have questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information or to sign up for the Master Food Preserver E-Newsletter, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at [http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master\\_Food\\_Preservers/](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/).