



Incredible Edibles

Pesto
Herb Vinegars
Vinaigrette
Boursin
Bouquet Garni

Recipes by Barbara Burns
from
The Splendid Garden

Come To Where The Flavor Is – Basil

"With basil then I will begin, whose scent is wondrous pleasing." ~Michael Drayton, 1612

Basil, was my first love in the herb world. Let me count the ways. Is it her charming anise or licorice scented leaves? Her sweet, peppery taste? The versatility she offers? Basil can be used in cooked, baked or fresh dishes, taking on a different personality in each.

Italian folklore has it that basil is a sign of love. If a woman places a pot of basil on her windowsill, she is ready to receive a suitor. And, if a man receives a sprig of basil from a maiden, he will fall hopelessly in love with her forever.



Basil Pesto

If you have never made or tried pesto before, fear not. It is simple. It looks like a thick, green paste. Remember, green is good and good for you. It really is the true taste of mid-summer. I serve pesto so many ways. In addition to pasta dishes, I also love it as a topping for a baked or broiled chicken breasts. Try adding a dollop to a creamy alfredo. Mmmm!

INGREDIENTS (Mine is sans pine nuts)

- 4 cups packed fresh basil leaves, no stems
- 1/4 cup pine nuts (I omit these as I am not a fan and the pesto turns out fine. You can also substitute toasted walnuts)
- 4 (at least) cloves garlic, crushed
- 3/4 cup or more extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup grated Parmesan or Romano cheese. Fresh is best, but if you don't have freshly grated Parmesan cheese, don't let that keep you from making this pesto. Use the regular Parmesan you buy in a can or jar.

DIRECTIONS

Combine the basil and garlic in a food processor and pulse until coarsely chopped. (add pine nuts here if you are a fan). Add 1/2 cup of the oil and process until fully incorporated and smooth.

Add the cheese and remaining olive oil. Pulse until just mixed.

If freezing, transfer to an air-tight container (I use the snack size zipper bags). Be sure to label baggies before adding the pesto. Any oil on the baggie makes this impossible for even permanent marker to adhere.

In Search of Tarragon

"Tomatoes and oregano make it Italian; wine and tarragon make it French. Sour cream makes it Russian; lemon and cinnamon make it Greek. Soy sauce makes it Chinese; garlic makes it good." ~Alice May Brock

I first became enamored with herbal vinegars after starting my own herb garden. They take a simple meal and turn it into something exquisite. Tarragon vinegar was first, of course, so I could master Béarnaise sauce and salad dressings.



Tarragon Vinegar

Use this for Béarnaise, a vinaigrette, or just to sprinkle on steamed spinach.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups white wine vinegar
- 1 Decorative glass bottle
- 1 c fresh French tarragon leaves (four to five 5-inch sprigs)

DIRECTIONS

Rinse and pat dry leaves to remove any excess water. Allow to air dry for about an hour to ensure water droplets have evaporated.

Fill sanitized glass bottle about half full with the French tarragon leaves that you rinsed well and patted dry.

Fill the jar/bottle with white wine vinegar. Make sure to add enough vinegar to cover the leaves. Cork the bottle and allow to sit in cool dark place for 2-4 weeks.

Vinegar Variations

Use the same ingredient proportions as for the Tarragon Vinegar.

Red Wine Vinegar, Garlic, Basil/Rosemary/Oregano. Perfect for salad dressings, marinades or seasoning dips.

Mexican Vinegar: Apple Cider Vinegar, cilantro, dried cayenne pepper (whole), garlic. Don't make a fajita without marinating the meat in this first.

White Wine Vinegar and fresh dill. Use in cucumber sour cream / yogurt salad and also as a marinade meaty fish like tuna or salmon.



Vinaigrette

~1/2 cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil

3 Tbsp Herb or Balsamic Vinegar

2 Tbsp minced fresh herbs (I especially like basil, dill, tarragon, oregano)

Salt & freshly ground black pepper.

Big squeeze of a fresh lemon

Remember the ratio of 3:1 (3 parts Oil, 1 part vinegar, though I like more vinegar, just because 😊)

Vinaigrette Variations: Be Adventurous!

(I recommend starting with adding 2-3 from the following list to your vinaigrette. Never the same twice, but a favorite every time.)

*1 tsp dry or prepared mustard (prepared gives a creamier texture and helps to emulsify or bind the ingredients to give a creamier dressing)

*1 fresh garlic clove (try roasted garlic, too)

*1Tbsp minced fresh green onion, red onion or shallots

*1 Tbsp minced fresh red, green, yellow, or orange pepper

*1/4 tsp whole herb seeds or spices

*1 tsp Worcestershire Sauce

*Few dashes soy sauce or a dash of ground cayenne

*1 Tbsp Parmesan or Romano

*1 Tbsp Crumbled bleu, feta or goat cheese

*1 minced anchovy filet (a must in my book)

*1 Tbsp minced pickled beets (how I have matured to love them)

*1/2 tsp sugar, honey, or maple syrup

You can beat the ingredients together in a bowl or even shake them in a jar. Then immediately sprinkle on your leafy greens so the oil does not separate from the vinegar and of course, dig-in quickly so the lettuce does not wilt. Don't be afraid to use as a marinade for meats or veggies!



This is Boursin...all dressed up with garlic, fresh herbs, and ready to be served with a good crisp cracker or breadstick.

Boursin

This the recipe that made me fall in love with Boursin, from Marge Clarke author of "It's About Thyme". It is the real thing. My variations are in parenthesis. As a purist, she would tell you, one can't make Boursin with dried herbs, only fresh will do. After trying this, I think you'll agree!

INGREDIENTS

8 ounces cream cheese. I use the low fat (not fat -free)
Juice of a whole lemon
1-2 cloves garlic, crushed
1/2 tsp Worcestershire
1/2 tsp dry mustard
1 Tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley
1 Tablespoon finely chopped fresh chives
4 Tablespoons minced fresh herbs, more is better (rosemary, thyme, dill, Greek oregano, marjoram, summer savory, basil or sage)

DIRECTIONS

Combine all ingredients but do not beat. Just mix gently and thoroughly. (Beating them will make the herbs smeary, as they are fresh. The flavor will be fine, (but you will ruin the presentation). Cover tightly and refrigerate. When ready to serve, bring to room temperature. Makes ~1 cup. (I like to shape the boursin into a roundish- ball and garnish with sprigs of fresh herbs)



Tips on Drying Herbs

*Tie stems in bundles and hang the herbs upside down. I use twist-ties so you can easily tighten the bundles since the stems shrink as they dry. A warm, dry, well ventilated spot is best.

*Herbs can also be dried on a rack or screen. An old window screen can be used if clean and in decent shape. Position such a screen to allow the air to move freely both sides of the screen. If using a screen, you'll need to turn the herbs every few days.

*Herbs should dry away from direct sunlight and moisture or they will mold. Drying times will take anywhere from one to two weeks, depending on the types of herbs you're drying. Once dried, strip the dried leaves from the stems.

*Store in decorative jars or zip-closed bags to keep fresh.

A bouquet garni is a bundle of aromatic herbs. It adds flavor to stews and soups, even simmering sauces. For a classic bouquet garni, gather together a few stalks of fresh parsley, thyme sprigs and bay leaves. Again, I like to categorize and play. Adding basil and oregano to the garni makes it Italian. Tarragon and chives make it French. Thyme and parsley make it chicken noodle soup! Add it to beef with a good "moire pas"(sauteed celery, carrots, onions) and it becomes stew.

Parsley, Boring? Never!

"Parsley - the jewel of herbs, both in the pot and on the plate." ~Albert Stockli

Parsley is a real workhorse in the kitchen and it's hard for me to imagine cooking without it. Parsley is equally at home in the background of your dish or playing center stage. In my everyday cooking, I can't think of many dishes that wouldn't benefit from a bit of parsley. I prefer the flat-leaved Italian over the curled, as it has more flavor. Overrated in the dry form. For reasons I don't understand, parsley is under-used in her fresh and more flavorful form. I believe the bright, grassy flavor of parsley allows her go places other herbs just can't.

Bouquet Garni

I can't help but notice that a bouquet garni with parsley looks like a boutineer. A bouquet garni is a bundle of aromatic herbs. It adds flavor to stews and soups, even simmering sauces. For a classic bouquet garni, gather together a few stalks of fresh parsley, thyme sprigs and bay leaves. I like to categorize and play. Adding basil and oregano to the garni makes it Italian. Tarragon and chives make it French. Thyme and parsley make it chicken noodle soup! Add it to beef with a good "moire pas" (The Holy Trinity in the kitchen: Sautéed celery, carrots, onions) and it becomes stew.



Method 1

I use unwaxed kitchen string to tie the bouquet garni, then add the bundle to the pot. This makes it easy to remove after cooking.

Method 2

To stop the herbs in the garni from coming apart in the liquid, you can tie them in a piece of muslin. Add a few whole black peppercorns, if you like.

Method 3

Put herbs in middle of coffee filter. Gather up and tie with unwaxed kitchen string. Make a mini assembly line and fix up several at a time. Store in airtight glass container until ready to use.

Garni I 1 Bay Leaf, 1 Tbsp dried tarragon, 1 Tbsp dried parsley, 1 tsp dried rosemary, 1 tsp dried thyme, 6 peppercorns.

Garni II 1 peeled clove garlic, 1 Tbsp dried parsley, 2 bay leaves, 6 peppercorns, 1 tsp each of dried oregano, basil, rosemary.

Bouquet Garni's can be made with fresh or dried herbs. Rule of thumb: 1 teaspoon dried equals 1 Tablespoon fresh, (1 Tbsp = 3 tsp). Once again, remember the ratio of 3:1 (3 teaspoons fresh is 1 teaspoon dried)



Compound Butters

I have made herb butter for years. It is a great way to use little sprigs and snippets of the end of season herbs. They are now all the rage and more properly called "compound butters" since they contain more than herbs. I add minced peppers, sun dried tomatoes, garlic and more. Once you have the basics down, you have my permission to play and create your own. The flavor combinations are endless.

I start with unsalted butter and add my own salts. I like to play here and add a Himalayan Pink salt, kosher or even a seasoned salt.

Directions are simple.

Soften unsalted butter and add the minced, savory tidbits of herbs. Stir with a fork to blend. I form mine into a log, wrap in a plastic wrap, place in freezer to harden. If sealed well, herb butter will last several months in the freezer. Let thaw in the refrigerator.

Ideas:

- ~Cut the butter into 1/4" medallions and fancy-up a plate for a dinner party.
- ~Serve on good crusty bread or baguette
- ~Makes a lovely twist to garlic toast I like to spread this version on thick slices of fresh, crusty bread and toast it under a broiler.
- ~Slather on grilled ears of corn. Unexpected, yum.
- ~After you saute shrimp, add a bit to the skillet and stir to coat the shrimp.
- ~Dollop on top of grilled meat, chicken, fish or shrimp
- ~Brush on grilled vegetables or kebabs

Sundried Tomato & Garlic Butter

- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 1 Tablespoon minced, sun dried tomatoes
- 1 Tablespoon minced, fresh basil
- 1 clove minced fresh garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Serve as topping for garlic toast

Mixed Herb Butter

- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh herbs (such as parsley, thyme, basil and oregano)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper