



Freezing Herbs

Some herbs maintain their flavor better when frozen instead of dried.

 ARTICLES | UPDATED: AUGUST 29, 2019



tegrafik on www.pixabay.com CCO

Freezing works well for herbs like parsley, dill, basil, chives lemon balm, mint or tarragon. Experiment with various herbs to determine which ones you prefer frozen. Frozen herbs can be used in the same proportion as fresh herbs. Keep in mind that freezing will cause the water in the cell walls to expand, and the herbs will be limp when thawed. As a result, you may prefer

to use frozen herbs in cooked dishes. They will generally not be attractive as garnishes.

Harvesting Herbs

- Most herbs are best for drying just before the flowers first open. Flowering herbs tend to be somewhat bitter.
- New leaves at the tip of the plant will have the most concentrated flavor.
- Select fresh herbs in mid-morning when dew is off the plants but before the sun has evaporated the oils that provide the flavor.
- Use scissors to cut the stems just above a leaf or pair of leaves. Leave 4 to 6 inches of stem for later growth.

- Rinse the herbs in clear water and pat dry or spin them dry in a salad spinner. Don't crush them.

Freezing Herbs in Ice Cube Trays in Water

- Strip leaves from stems and chop them as you would to use them fresh.
- Fill an ice cube tray half full of water. Place herbs in each section of the tray—about 1 tablespoon in each.
- Push herbs under the water as much as possible. Place in the freezer.
- The next day when herb cubes are frozen solid, add additional water to top off the cube. Return to the freezer and freeze solid.
- After the trays are frozen solid, pop out the herb cubes and store in a freezer bag. Label and date.
- Strong smelling herbs should be double wrapped in foil or placed in freezer jars to avoid the transfer of odors.
- To use, add a frozen cube in soups, sauces, stews or other combination cooked dishes.

Freezing Herbs in Oil

- Chop herbs. Mix $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of oil with 2 cups of chopped herbs. (The oil allows the mixture to be scraped from the jar more easily because it doesn't freeze as hard.)
- This can be frozen in ice cube trays and used as above, or it can be frozen in small jelly jars. The oil will not freeze solid like ice, and you can scrape out the amount you want to use.
- A neutral flavored vegetable oil such as canola oil allows the flavor of the herb to dominate. Olive oil is suitable if it complements the flavor of the herb.
- Herbs frozen in oil maintain their color better than those frozen individually. This method works well with basil.
- Another option is to make a paste by mixing $\frac{1}{3}$ cup oil with 2 cups fresh herbs in a blender until smooth.

NOTE: Oil should only be added to herbs if it will be frozen. Do not store herbs in oil at room temperature.

Freezing Herbs Flat

Cooks find that herbs frozen in cubes cook unevenly as the cube melts. Try this alternative for use in sauces and cooked dishes.

- Place a thin layer of chopped herbs and oil inside a zipper-lock bag.
- Seal leaving about a half-inch of space open.
- Squeeze out excess air before sealing the bag completely.
- Place the bag on a large plate or baking sheet, spreading out the herb mixture to a thin, even layer and place it in the freezer until completely frozen solid.
- When ready to use, cut or break off as much as you need, reseal the bag, and store the rest for later use.
- Because of the greater surface area, herbs frozen this way freeze and melt quickly.

Freezing Stems and Leaves.

Leaves:

- Strip leaves off the stems and spread in a single layer on a cookie sheet and place in the freezer.
- As soon as they are frozen, place them in a freezer bag.
- Because the leaves are frozen separately, you can remove the amount you need.
- Caution: Work quickly when removing leaves from the bag to avoid thawing. When thawed and refrozen the leaves will freeze together.
- Chop chives and lemon grass before freezing. They are thin and will freeze quickly.
- Another option is to blanch leaves of larger herbs such as basil for 15 seconds to stop enzyme reactions; immediately plunge in ice water to stop the cooking. Drain, pat dry and freeze on a tray before packaging.

Stems:

- Dill weed can be frozen as stems.
- Wrap 3 or 4 stems in plastic wrap and then over-wrap in aluminum foil. Freeze.
- Dill weed will become limp and dark in color but will still impart flavor for pickling.
- Rosemary and thyme can also be frozen on the stem.

Caution: Herbs give off odors that can be absorbed by other foods in the freezer. Avoid the transfer of odors by wrapping herbs in foil or placing in glass jars with an

air tight lid. Plastic freezer bags and boxes suitable for freezing vegetables and fruits allow for the transfer of odors.

Do not thaw herbs before adding to cooked dishes.