

Back to...Cooking School: Working with Fresh Herbs



Today in cooking school we'll be looking at herbs and how to cut them. Fresh herbs can add bursts of flavor that no dried herb can emulate. At our house we grow them all summer long, picking off what we need for each dish, making pesto and preserving them for use during the winter.

I've noticed, though, that when working with fresh herbs, some people get stuck on how exactly to go about using them. It's like you've handed them this plant that has no real instructions. Instead of working with the fruit or roots of the plant, they're now focused on leaves, and they've probably never used them before.

So, let's break it down. **Let's go over a few techniques for chopping herbs to add to your dishes, as well as how we can save any extra herbs for use later on.**



Washing herbs

Herbs are a plant, and like most plants, they're exposed to nature with all its bugs and dirt. While I'm not afraid of bugs and dirt, I don't need to be eating them or their byproducts. For this reason, I choose to submerge my herbs in cold water rather than just rinsing them off.

By dunking my herbs fully and giving them a good shake while in the water, I'm ensuring that I'm rinsing off all the nooks and crannies of the plant. If the herbs are tightly bound anywhere, be sure to pull leaves apart so that you're exposing all of the surface areas.



Removing Stems

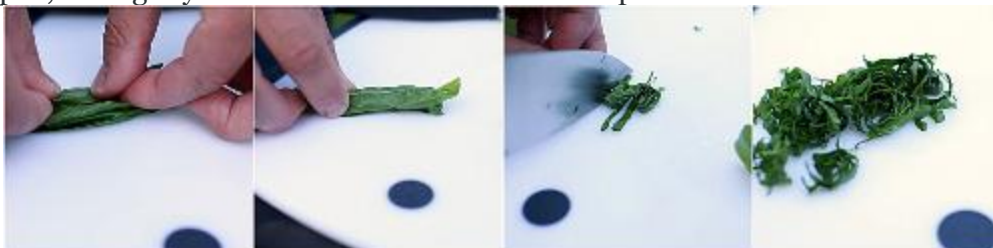
For many herbs, you'll be removing stems. When working with herbs such as parsley, dill and sage, removing the main stem or stalk is the most important part. The smaller stems that the leaves are attached too are okay to leave a bit on here and there.

For herbs with woody stalks like rosemary and thyme you'll want to strip the leaves at their base to avoid any bitter stems. However, don't throw those stems away. Toss them into your vegetable broths or chicken and beef stock.

Chopping Herbs

CHIFFONADE

A chiffonade makes thin ribbon strips of leafy herbs like basil or sage. Simple stack the herbs together into a pile, roll tightly and make thin slices with a sharp knife.



CHOPPING

For herbs that don't have large, broad leaves, remove any large stem pieces and place in a tight pile. Hold the pile down with one hand and chop using a hinge method, leading your knife through the pile. Pull the pile into another tight pile and chop again until the desired fineness is achieved.



Preserving

ICE CUBES

Extra chopped herbs can easily be preserved by adding a teaspoon to ice cube trays, covering with a teaspoon of water and frozen. **These frozen herb-sicles can be added to soups or dishes as they are heating for a fresh burst of flavor in winter months.**



ROLLED PACKETS

After rinsing and drying fresh herbs, stack them as evenly as possible into a pile. Roll tightly and place in the bottom of a freezer zip-top bag or reusable bag. Remove all air from the bag and seal tightly. Freeze. You can slice strips in the desired amount of the end of this roll to add to dishes once it is frozen.



I hope I've inspired you to not be afraid to reach for the fresh herbs instead of the dried when cooking if you didn't already and to perhaps consider growing your own to [preserve for use in the winter](http://www.simplebites.net/back-to-cooking-school-working-with-fresh-herbs/).

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