

Food Safety and Quality

Herbal Vinegars

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Making your own herbal vinegar can be a very enlightening and tasteful experience. These flavored vinegars have become very popular and add variety to your meals. Some of the more popular herbal vinegars contain such herbs as basil, tarragon, marjoram, thyme or rosemary. There are many other herbs that can be used or various combinations of several may be incorporated into the vinegar.

The type of vinegar used varies with the cook; some use distilled white vinegar, others cider vinegar. The better flavor generally comes from using the distilled white vinegar that comes from grain alcohol since there are fewer flavors competing with the herb flavor. Today many gourmets choose wine vinegar, which is more expensive and has characteristic flavors.



A good rule-of-thumb in making herbal vinegar is to use a half a cup of freshly crushed or bruised leaves of the herb to two cups of vinegar. If garlic is used, crush it and leave it in the solution only 24 hours. You do not want to “overload” the vinegar so its preservative strength is diminished and it cannot hold more herbal material. Dried herbs may also be used at the rate of one tablespoon of dried herbs to two cups of vinegar.

The inviting experience of making and using your own herbal vinegar is rewarding and provides variety to your meals. By experimenting with different combinations of herbs, you can discover your own subtle tastes and become an expert in making herbal vinegar.

Making herbal vinegar is simple and safe. However, do not try to bottle herbs and oil together. The oil does not have the same preservative ability as the vinegar and will allow harmful microorganisms to grow.

Three basic methods in preparing herbal vinegars are as follows:

Heated Vinegar — Fill plastic gallon jug approximately one-half full with fresh herbs. Then pour hot (not boiling) vinegar over herbs and fill gallon container with vinegar. Store in dark area and mix contents daily for four to six weeks. Strain and add several sprigs of herbs. This is often the preferred method since it tends to draw out more flavor from the herb.

Cold Method — Add the herbs, etc., to cold vinegar. Let stand four to six weeks. Strain, add new herbs.

Solar Method — Add herbs to vinegar. Place outside in sunshine. Strain in four weeks. Add fresh herbs. This method can present problems with insects and flies.

Storage

Store in dark, cool area (pantry) in glass jar sealed with non-metallic closures, i.e. corks. If corks are used, dip in hot paraffin several times to assure proper seal. Metallic lids can be used by placing wax paper over the opening and screwing the lid on over the wax paper.

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