



# ALL ABOUT HERBS MEDICINAL & CULINARY FACT SHEET

Today we enjoy herbs for their ability to compliment certain foods. The use of herbs to bring out the best flavors in meats, vegetables and seafood has been a staple of cooking for thousands of years. The medicinal uses of these same herbs may have been around just as long but the medicinal values have become lost. For fun this factsheet takes us back to a time almost forgotten, when herbs had dual uses and knowing their medicinal properties was more important than the flavors they added to a favorite soup or stew. What is an herb? How is it different from a spice and what medicinal values did they once hold?

**Herb:** Plants where the seasoning qualities are obtained from the vegetative portion of the plant. Cilantro, basil and oregano are good examples of herbs.

**Spice:** The seasoning quality of a spice is principally derived from whole, ground or cracked portions of the seed, flower or root. Pepper, saffron, ginger and coriander (seeds of cilantro) are good examples of spices.

## BASIL

*Ocimum basilicum*

**Medicinal use:** Basil is a tender annual and was used as an antispasmodic, galactagogue (breast milk stimulator), carminative (gas reliever), expectorant, and mild sedative. Applied externally, basil is an excellent insect repellent. In India, basil was used as an antidote for snake venom.

**Culinary use:** Basil is used both fresh and dried in Italian cooking and is an excellent compliment in fresh salads, sauces and is the main ingredient in "pesto". Basil seems also to have a symbiotic beneficial growing relationship with tomatoes in the home garden. Plant them near each other and watch both thrive better than if planted alone.

## CHIVES

*Allium schoenoprasum*

**Medicinal use:** Chives are a bulb-perennial and Allium or onion had a multitude of medicinal uses in years past. The properties directly related to Common chive were as an antiseptic, carminative, diuretic, and taken for the relief of digestive ailments and to fight anemia.

**Culinary uses:** Chives are a versatile herb with a mild onion flavor useful in vegetable dips and as a component in poultry, beef and seafood sauces.

## LAVENDER

*Lavandula angustifolia*

**Medicinal use:** Lavender is a perennial that was used as a carminative, anti-spasmodic, anti-depressant, rubefacient (a salve that reddens the face), and anti-emetic (stops vomiting). Lavender has been used as an effective herb for headaches, especially when they are related to stress and it is still used to soothe and promote natural sleep. Lavender has no culinary uses but it was a staple as one of the "strewing herbs" used to keep the home smelling nice by sprinkling floors with its natural fragrance before the invention of aerosol room fresheners.

## PARSLEY

*Petroselinum crispum*

**Medicinal use:** Parsley is an annual that was used to reduce bad breath, as a diuretic, carminative, laxative and as a tonic for the urinary system. Parsley is said to aid in kidney stones, gallstones, jaundice, asthma, coughs, indigestion, and dropsy, (tumors). When used topically parsley was said to have anti-microbial and antipyretic, (fever reducer) properties.

**Culinary use:** Parsley today is used mainly in poultry stuffing, soups and as a garnish.

## SAGE

*Salvia officinalis*

**Medicinal use:** Sage is a tender perennial that had a multitude of home uses as a stimulant, carminative, astringent, antispasmodic, antiseptic, and immune system stimulant. Sage was also used as a mouthwash, gargle, for fevers and upset stomach and to treat tonsillitis, stomatitis, gingivitis, headaches, night sweats and dyspepsia (indigestion).

**Culinary use:** What would Thanksgiving stuffing be like without sage? Sage seems to also bring out the best in pork, poultry, some cheeses and seafood dishes.

## THYME

*Thymus vulgaris*

**Medicinal use:** Thyme is a hardy perennial with carminative, anti-microbial, anti-spasmodic, expectorant, astringent, anthelmintic (intestinal worm killer), anti-catarrrhal (decongestant), tonic (mild stimulant), and vulnerary (wound healer) properties. Thyme found additional uses as a mouthwash, sedative and as an antidote for headaches and depression. The ancient Egyptians used the oil for embalming and understood the antiseptic and preservative properties of thyme. This cultivated herb was used externally as a wash for scabies, gout, rheumatism, insect bites, eczema, and as a soothing skin tonic.

**Culinary use:** Thyme is a hardy perennial that is easy to cultivate and persistent even through New Jersey's harsh winters. Thyme seems to complement beef, pork, poultry and seafood. Is it any wonder that Thyme's ease of cultivation and universal flavoring qualities make it a favorite in a wide range of cultural dishes?

**For More Information on the medicinal benefits of herbs on the web:**

<http://www.herbs.org/>

<http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11571.cfm?search=thyme&tab=HC&x=13&y=17>

<http://cherokeevalley.com/herbs.html>

<http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/comindxc.html>