

Herbal Cookery E-Course



Week 2: Herbal Infusions

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How to Strain Herbal Infusions

Before we get too far into the making of herbal infusions, let's talk about straining. All of the liquid infusions will require straining. There are a few easy ways to do this:

A fine mesh sieve – this is my go-to straining method. They come in a variety of sizes and strain out big pieces of herbs without any trouble at all. You can also line this cheesecloth for smaller of bit herbs that might make it through the screening.



A Reusable coffee filter – paper coffee filters will also work but a reusable one is more sustainable and likely to last a lifetime.



Keeping Track of Herbal Infusions

Once we get started it's easy to get those herbal infusions confused in the cabinet. Before I put any infusion in the cabinet or in the window for infusing, I label it.

Simply use a piece of masking tape and note what it's inside and when it was started or when it should be strained. For example: Mint in Vodka – Strain on 9/13/16. This lets me know what exactly is in the jar and when it's ready for straining.

Having that label makes everything easier when those cabinets start to fill up. I save the nicer labels for when the strained infusion is put away for use.



How to Make Herbal Extracts

You can create your own customized extracts for baking with herbs growing right in your backyard. Pump the flavor of all your cakes and cookies with these interesting and intense liquids.

This is a method not a precise recipe. You can start with as big or small of a jar as you'd like. Personally, I use half-pint jars most of the time for baking extracts and find that to be enough to last me an entire year of baking.

To experiment with new ideas and flavors use a four-ounce jar. This way there's not a lot of waste if the particular extract doesn't turn out the way you had envisioned.

Materials Needed:

- A clean glass jar with a tight fitting lid
- Fresh herb of your choice
- Vodka (or vegetable glycerin)

Method:

Step 1: Fill a jar $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ full with fresh herbs (washed and excess moisture removed). Muddle those herbs slightly with the back of spoon or the handle of wooden spoon. Just bruise them slightly. (To use dried herbs fill the jar $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ full)

Step 2: Fill the jar with vodka (use the cheap stuff), leaving 1/2" headspace in the jar. Seal the jar with a tight fitting lid. Give it a good shake. To make this alcohol-free substitute food-grade vegetable glycerin for the vodka.

Step 3: Put that jar in a dark cabinet and let it steep for a month. Give it a shake now and then when you remember.

Step 4: At the end of the month, strain herbs from the extract. Be sure to squeeze the moisture out of the leaves. Put the extract in a clean bottle and label. Store out of direct sunlight.

Note: This method is essentially the same as a folkloric medicinal herbal tincture. It's also the same method to use in making cordials and liqueurs (which is covered in the drinks module).

Herbs to Use for Herbal Extracts:

Technically any herbs can be used for this but consider using herbs that would make for flavorful baked goods.

- Bee Balm: flower petals and leaves
- Chamomile blossoms
- Dandelion flower petals (though it mostly ends up tasting like honey)
- Hyssop (and Anise Hyssop)
- Lavender flowers
- Lemon Balm
- Lemon Grass
- Lemon Verbena
- Lilac blossoms
- Mint (any of the mints – chocolate, apple, etc.)
- Pineapple Sage
- Raspberry leaves – use extremely fresh or completely dried, no slightly wilted here
- Red Clover blossoms
- Roses : The petals and the hips
- Strawberry leaves
- Violet flower petals
- White Clover blossoms(has a very subtle vanilla flavor)

How to Use Herbal Extracts



Simply use them in recipes instead of vanilla extract to pump up flavor and give your baked goods a completely personal and homegrown touch.

Herbal Infused Honey

This is more a method than an actual recipe. It's oh-so-tasty and a great way to experiment with using herbs in new and different ways.

Materials Needed:

- A clean glass jar with a tight fitting lid
- Fresh herb of your choice
- Honey

Method:

Step 1: Fill your jar half full with herb (or mixture) of choice. Slightly crush the herbs with the back of spoon or the handle of wooden spoon.

Step 2: Fill the jar completely full, leaving ¼" headspace with honey. If the honey is especially thick, warm it first in a double boiler.

Step 3: Seal the jar with the lid and place in a sunny window. Turn the jar over every other day or so (when you remember).

Step 4: Leave the jar in the window for 3-4 weeks.

Step 5: At the end of the infusing period (3 or 4 weeks), strain the herbs from the honey. Again, if too thick warm slightly in a double boiler then pour through a fine mesh strainer. Store the honey in a clean glass jar in your pantry. The herbs are candied at this point and can be munched on freely, if desired.

While the tendency might be to use sweeter herbs as those used in herbal extracts. There are plenty of reasons to consider savory choices as well here.

- Basil: A small dollop in a pot of tomato sauce can help balance out acidity and add flavor
- Oregano: Use in place of regular honey or sugar in bread recipes for a slightly herbal hit
- Rosemary: Use as a glaze on roasted carrots or grilled shrimp
- Sage: Makes a perfect glaze for pork

A note about garlic: Fresh garlic has a tendency to ferment when infused in honey. That's not necessarily a bad thing but not the point of this method. For infused garlic honey, use dried / powdered garlic.

How to Use Herbal Infused Honey:

Use the honey to sweeten drinks, add to desserts, or highlight the flavor with the following recipe ideas:



Honey Glaze for Meat (or Tofu)

- 1 Cup Honey
- ½ Cup Soy Sauce (or Bragg's Liquid Aminos)
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil
- 2 Tablespoons Tomato Paste (or Ketchup)
- 3 Cloves Garlic, minced
- Pinch Red Pepper Flakes (optional and more or less, to taste)
- Salt & Pepper, to taste

Whisk everything together and brush on meat before grilling or pour over meat and bake in oven until meat is cooked thoroughly.

Note: This should coat about 3 pounds of meat, double for larger batches.

Honey Vinaigrette

- 2 Tablespoons Vinegar (perhaps the garden salad vinegar)
- 1 Tablespoon Honey
- ¼ Cup Olive Oil
- Salt & Pepper to Taste

Whisk together and drizzle over salad.

Honey Yogurt Dipping Sauce

- 1 Cup Plain Yogurt
- 3 Tablespoons Honey
- 1 Tablespoon Fresh Mint, chopped

Mix together and serve over fruit or pound cake.

How to Make Herbal Infused Vinegar

Again, a method not a precise recipe – allow yourself to be creative.

Materials Needed:

- A clean glass jar with a tight fitting lid
- Fresh herb of your choice
- Vinegar (any, your choice)

Method:

Step 1: Fill a jar $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ full with fresh herbs (washed and excess moisture removed). Muddle those herbs slightly with the back of spoon or the handle of wooden spoon. Just bruise them slightly. (To use dried herbs fill the jar $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ full)

Step 2: Fill the jar with vinegar, leaving 1/2" headspace in the jar. Seal the jar with a tight fitting lid. Give it a good shake.

Step 3: Put that jar in a dark cabinet and let it steep for 2 weeks (longer is okay). Give it a shake now and then when you remember.

Step 4: At the end of the 2 weeks, strain herbs from the extract. Be sure to squeeze the moisture out of the leaves. Put the vinegar in a clean bottle and label. Store out of direct sunlight.

Herbs & Vinegars to Use for Herbal Vinegars:

Use any vinegar that is preferred on hand to make herbal vinegars. Some combinations are particularly delightful, however:

- Basil & apple cider vinegar
- Chive blossoms & champagne vinegar (this will turn a delightful color)
- Lovage leaves & rice wine vinegar
- Nasturtium petals & white wine vinegar
- Rosemary & balsamic vinegar
- Sage & apple cider vinegar
- Thyme & red wine vinegar

How to Use Herbal Vinegars:

Use these flavorful vinegars anywhere you would use plain vinegar:

- Use in sweet & sour soup
- Make a pickle brine
- Salad dressings, of course
- Make a marinade
- Use in shrubs (more on this in the drinks module)

Garden Salad Vinegar

- 1/3 Cup Tarragon Leaves, torn
- 1/3 Cup Chervil Leaves, torn
- 1/3 Cup Fennel Leaves
- 2 Cups Rice Vinegar

Combine herbs and vinegar into a clean jar. Let steep at least a week (longer if desired) before straining. Pour into clean jars for storage.

How to Make Herbal Salts

- ½ Cup Coarse Salt
- ½ Cup Chopped Herbs

Mix everything together and spread onto a cookie sheet. Let dry at room temperature. Stir every day to break up clumps. When herbs are completely dry, mix all together and store in airtight container.

How to Use Herbal Salts:

Use in place of unflavored salt in any recipe.

- Lemon Balm (Lemon Verbena / Lemon Grass) in salt is great on chicken
- Sage (or chive) salt is yummy on potatoes
- Rosemary salt is perfect on most any vegetable
- Mint salt is great on cucumber salads

How to Make Herbal Sugar

- ½ Cup Sugar
- ½ Cup Chopped Herbs

Mix everything together and spread onto a cookie sheet. Let dry at room temperature. Stir every day to break up clumps. When herbs are completely dry, mix all together and store in airtight container.

For powdered sugar, whirl through a blender until superfine and use in frostings, etc.

How to Use Herbal Sugar

Quite simply use anywhere, unflavored sugar is used for a subtle herbal hit.