

Churston Traditional

FARM SHOP

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RECIPES August 2016

No-one is going to pretend it's been an outstanding summer and – particularly after that long, cold spring – this year gardeners have faced more than the usual number of challenges.

On the other hand with the season still running a week or so behind schedule that means that August still provides a chance to harvest herbs for the winter.

No garden should be without a decent range of herbs because fresh or home-preserved ones add far more flavour to food than anything you can buy from a supermarket.

Not all herbs, of course, require cutting and storing for the colder weather: sage, rosemary and thyme, and indeed parsley, will be quite happy in the ground where they are. But others such as tarragon and chives will disappear when autumn sets in so now's the time to start cutting.

Herbs are roughly divided into two groups: those which dry well and those which don't. The former include thyme, sage, rosemary, oregano, marjoram and bay, the latter tarragon, chives, parsley, basil, chervil, dill and fennel.

The non-drying one can either be chopped mixed with a little oil and frozen in ice cube trays or turned into herb butter – particularly good when forced under the breast skin of a chicken before roasting. And drying herbs is just as simple: the powdered version suggested here delivers huge amounts of flavour.

HERB BUTTER

Ingredients. 250g softened salted butter, two tablespoons each fresh chopped chives, tarragon, parsley and chervil, squeeze of lemon juice, 10 grindings of black pepper.

Method. Fork the herbs into the butter in a large bowl and add the lemon juice and pepper as soon as they are well incorporated. Transfer to a sheet of film and roll into a sausage shape. Divide into six pieces, wrap each in film and freeze immediately. Delicious when added to steamed, boiled or mashed potatoes, or to boiled carrots.

POWDERED HERBS

You can make this by drying the herbs on a sheet of paper in the bottom of an oven set to the lowest heat and with the door left open. But most of us have a warmish spot in the house, such as next to a boiler, or in an airing cupboard, where the job can be done just as well and at nil cost.

Take handfuls of thyme, sage, oregano and rosemary and a few bay leaves and place in a paper bag. Hang somewhere warm and airy for two weeks. Once completely dry remove from the bag and over a sheet of newspaper rub the herbs together to separate the stalks. Carefully tip the leaves into an electric spice mill or coffee grinder and whizz to a dust. Store in small airtight jars until needed. Excellent sprinkled over chicken or pork chops before cooking or added to stuffing or for topping grilled tomatoes.

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