

COOKING WITH FRESH HERBS



A Primer from the
One Block West Kitchen

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One Block West
sensational seasonal cuisine™

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This cookbook is the result of requests from guests at my restaurant One Block West in Winchester, Virginia and from readers of my blog One Blog West.

This book collects in one convenient location information from my blog about commonly used herbs along with recipes from the blog and some brand new recipes from the restaurant for your enjoyment. Each recipe illustrates one of the herbs that we grow and use frequently at the restaurant. The recipes in this book are in part the result of a demonstration of cooking with herbs that I perform annually at the State Arboretum of Virginia, where the staff is kind enough to permit me use what I will from their vast collection of herbs.

Selecting recipes for this annual demonstration is difficult for me because literally almost everything I cook involves fresh herbs. I had the very same problem in selecting the recipes for this book.

I've often said that one of the key differences between home cooking and restaurant cooking is the lavish use of fresh herbs in restaurant cooking. This book will give you a lot of ideas for elevating your home cooking to the next level. I've chosen each of these recipes as suitable for the moderately advanced and curious home chef.

I hope that you enjoy this book and I also hope that you will feel free to send it to your friends. They are welcome to use the book in any non-commercial manner.

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BASIL

A very tender herb from tropical Asia that is now firmly cemented in the Mediterranean, the basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) that we refer to as sweet basil (as opposed to *Thai basil* or *Holy basil*) is an extremely common herb in Western cuisine. Nothing screams Southern Italian more than basil and the happy combination of basil and tomatoes are forever joined in my cooking vocabulary.

Flavor Profile. Most of the culinary basil has some mint, licorice, or cinnamon flavor components. Each kind of basil varies slightly in flavor, but they are all wonderful. Younger leaves from shoots that have not bloomed tend to be most flavorful; older leaves from woodier stems tend to be more bitter and aggressive.

Preparation. The leaves are stripped from the tougher stems and are generally sliced in ribbons called a *chiffonade*. Sometimes whole leaves are called for such as in Insalata Caprese, a salad of tomatoes, fresh mozzarella, and basil. Basil is also made into a sauce with olive oil, garlic, nuts, and cheese, called pesto. Store basil with its stems in water at room temperature; cold ruins it.

How to Use. Key in Southern Italian dishes, with tomatoes, and as part of herb marinade mixes, basil is almost always added at the end of cooking or is used raw. Long cooking destroys the fresh basil flavor that I crave.

Growing Your Own. Luckily, basil grows easily from seed once the ground warms up. Pinch it back liberally to keep it from blooming.



Bruschetta of Sun-Dried Tomatoes, Basil, and Feta Cheese

I make this simple appetizer in the middle of winter with hothouse basil just to remind myself of the glories of summer eating.

2 cups/8 ounces sun-dried tomatoes, sliced into strips
1 cup/4 ounces feta cheese, crumbled
18 leaves fresh basil, sliced *en chiffonade*
3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
salt and pepper, to taste
4 slices rustic bread
extra virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove

Mix the sliced sun-dried tomatoes, feta cheese, basil, and balsamic vinegar in a small bowl. Brush the bread with olive oil and grill or broil until slightly browned. Rub each slice of bread with the garlic clove and top with a quarter of the sun-dried tomato mix. The mix is better if it has a chance to sit and macerate for a while. *Serves four.*

CHIVES

The smallest onions and the mildest in flavor, chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) are a workhorse for me, always featuring in my herb marinades. Chives are the blue-green tops of the plant; the bulbs remain underground and will regrow year after year. The beautiful spherical lavender blooms are edible and make a gorgeous garnish.

Flavor Profile. Chives have a mild onion flavor; chive blooms are both decorative and edible and have a slightly more garlic flavor than the milder leaves.

Preparation. Chives are almost always sliced into very fine rings across the grain.

How to Use. Use chives to bring a bit of color to light colored foods or when you want a gentle onion flavor. They are a classic component of [fines herbes](#) and feature in many herb marinades. Add chives at the last moment to preserve their delicate flavor, color, and texture. The beautiful lavender blossoms make outstanding garnishes and I often shred them into omelettes and salads.

Growing Your Own. For best results, it's best to start with a bunch of chives from a nursery. Chives are easily divided and replanted and once established, they are carefree and easily self-seeding to the point of being a pest! Even if you only have a coffee can on the windowsill, you should have some chives.



Pan-Roasted Striped Bass with Chive Oil and Chive Beurre Blanc

Here's a really simple, classic fish dish of the type that we serve at the restaurant. It uses two techniques, an herb oil and a beurre blanc, that will serve you well if you incorporate them into your repertoire. Both these techniques showcase common ways of using chives.

Chive Oil

1 ounce chives (a bundle about an inch/2.5cm in diameter)
16 fluid ounces vegetable oil

Roughly chop the chives and place in a blender container with the oil. Blend until as smooth as your blender can make it. Strain the oil through three or four layers of cheesecloth to remove the rough solids. At this point, you can use the oil, but it will clarify if you let it stand overnight at room temperature, at which point you can decant the clear oil from the remaining solids. Yields 2 cups or 16 fluid ounces of bright green, chive-flavored oil. Use this same technique to make almost any herb or herb mixture oil. (cont'd)

Chive Beurre Blanc

A beurre blanc, literally “white butter” in French, is an emulsified white wine and butter sauce commonly used to dress seafood and poultry. My beurre blanc is slightly non-traditional in that I use black pepper (I like the spots in my sauce) during the reduction, no vinegar or lemon juice, and I don’t strain it. Traditionally in classic French cooking, you would use less wine, some vinegar or lemon juice, and would strain the solids out of the sauce before seasoning with white pepper and salt. Either way, learn the basic technique of mounting a sauce with cold butter and you will be well served.

8 fluid ounces dry white wine
2 ounces (about one large) shallot, minced
1 pinch black pepper
1 tablespoon chives, finely minced
4 ounces cold butter, diced
Salt to taste

Place the wine, shallots, and black pepper in a sauce pan and reduce until the wine is syrupy. Off the heat, add the butter and whisk constantly until the butter is melted and the sauce is thickened. Traditionally, at this point, you would strain the sauce and season it with salt, white pepper, and would add the chives.

You should serve the sauce immediately. If you have to hold it, you must hold it warm. If you hold the sauce too hot, it will break and too cold, it will solidify. If you must hold this sauce, do not add the chives until you are ready to serve the sauce. The acid in the sauce will turn the beautiful bright green chives an unexciting olive drab. Yields about 8 fluid ounces, 1 cup, of sauce.

Pan-Roasted Striped Bass

Substitute any mild white fish for Striped Bass (which we call Rockfish in the area around the Chesapeake Bay).

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
4 striped bass filets, skin on or off as you like
Salt and pepper
Chive oil
Chive beurre blanc

Preheat your oven to hot, 450F. Heat a large ovenproof frying pan or two smaller ones over high heat, then film with oil. Meanwhile, season the fish with salt and pepper. Sear the fish well on each side for a couple of minutes until brown. Place the pan in the oven and finish cooking. The fish will be done when it is opaque all the way to the center. A fair rule of thumb is about 10 minutes total cooking time per inch of thickness, including the time on top of the stove. Of course, there is no shame in using a knife to cut open a piece to see if it is done; there is only shame in overcooking such a beautiful fish.

I like to plate this fish with a seasonal green vegetable such as asparagus down on the plate with the fish skin side up (why not show off those gorgeous stripes?). Then I spoon on a little beurre blanc and drizzle the plate with chive oil. A little minced chives and/or chive flowers for garnish completes the plate.

Serves four.

CILANTRO

Nothing screams “Fresh!” like cilantro (*Coriandrum sativum*), whose seeds are called coriander. The most commonly used fresh herb in the world, cilantro (also known by its Hindi name *dhania*) features in all my Latino cooking, in Indian chutneys (*dhania chatni*, for example), in green sauces (such as *chimichurri*) and as a primary flavoring ingredient in salsas.

Flavor Profile. Most people find cilantro to have an inimitable bright and fresh herbal flavor, but the flavor is pronounced so use cilantro sparingly. Be aware that as much as ten percent of the population finds cilantro disgustingly soapy tasting (this is believed to be a genetic issue).

Preparation. Cilantro is most often plucked from the stems and used whole as garnish or chopped and sprinkled over dishes right before service. Cilantro is rarely cooked.

How to Use. Cilantro stars in Caribbean and Latino cooking, especially in salsas and tacos, and as a garnish on just about anything. It’s also part of the table salad served with most dishes in Southeast Asia. Cilantro is used all over the world as a last second garnish to a variety of dishes. It’s also a major component of many green sauces including the Argentinean classic *chimichurri*.

Growing Your Own. Cilantro grows trivially from seed, but does not tolerate heat well, so grow in the early and late seasons.



Pan-Roasted Corvina with Persimmon Salsa

*I chose this dish to illustrate the use of cilantro in salsa. *Persimmons* are available in the late fall and winter and have a flavor reminiscent of papaya, mango, and apricot. Mangoes would be equally as good in this recipe.*

I chose Corvina, a white flaky fish in the Drum family, to carry through the Latin concept behind this dish. Substitute any similar fish such as Red Drum, Snapper, or Grouper. (cont'd)

Persimmon Salsa

I chose persimmons for this recipe because I love their flavor—reminiscent of mango and papaya with a touch of apricot—and because I want you to try them and not be scared of them. You can substitute any similar fruit in this recipe: mango, papaya, apricot, peach, and so forth. This recipe calls for the firm (like an apple) Fuyu persimmons rather than the softer Hachiya persimmons, which you will have a hard time dicing. The vanilla extract is, if I say so myself, a brilliant touch for fruit salsas.

4 Fuyu persimmons, about 1 ¼ pounds (500g)
1 bunch (about 10) green onions, sliced into rings
½ small red onion, finely minced
½ bunch cilantro, minced
1 serrano chile, finely minced
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1 pinch salt
juice of one lime
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Mix all the ingredients well and let stand for a few minutes before serving. Feel free to substitute any chiles you like: habañeros are particularly good in this recipe. Yields a bit less than a quart (1 liter) of salsa.

Achiote Oil

I love the beautiful deep yellow color of this oil made from achiote seeds, perhaps better known in English as annatto seeds.

1 cup (8 fluid ounces) vegetable oil
1 tablespoon achiote seeds

Heat the achiote and oil over medium heat until the oil takes on a deep orange color and the achiote seeds start to sizzle. Do not let the achiote burn. Strain and reserve. Yields one cup (8 fluid ounces).

Pan-Roasted Corvina

Substitute any mild white fish for Corvina. I use Corvina in preference to many snappers and groupers which are overfished.

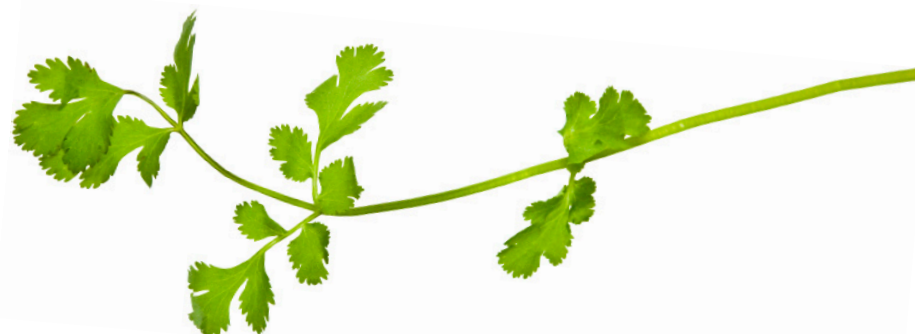
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
4 Corvina filets
Wondra (or flour) seasoned with salt and pepper
achiote oil (optional)

Preheat the oven to hot, 450F. Heat a large ovenproof frying pan or two smaller ones over high heat, then film with oil. Dredge the fish in the seasoned flour. Sear the fish well on the bottom side for a couple of minutes until brown. Flip the fish over and brush with achiote oil. Cook for another couple of minutes on top of the stove.

Place the pan in the oven and finish cooking. The fish will be done when it is opaque all the way to the center. A fair rule of thumb is about 10 minutes total cooking time per inch of thickness, including the time on top of the stove. Of course, there is no shame in using a knife to cut open a piece to see if it is done; there is only shame in overcooking such a beautiful fish.

Before plating and after resting, I brush the tops of the filets again with achiote oil, just to give them a deep yellow shine. I plate this fish on top of plantains (for example *plátanos fritos*, *mofongo*, *tostones*) and black beans, with a little persimmon salsa on top of the fish. Garnish with more fresh cilantro.

Serves four.



DILL

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) is also known as dill weed and is one of my favorite herbs. When I think dill, I think reflexively of cucumbers, sour cream, and salmon. An inoffensive herb, fresh dill can be used in fairly large quantities.

Flavor Profile. Dill has a bright, fresh, slightly tangy flavor and an expansive fragrance that reminds me of spring. Dill seed resembles caraway seed in flavor.

Preparation. Pluck the tender ends off the fern-like stalks and chop lightly. Remove any large stems. Young blooms can be chopped as well and taste identical to the leaves.

How to Use. Dill is common in Greek food, in Central European food, Scandinavian food, and frequently seasons fish, eggs, poultry, and other mild dishes in Western European cooking. Dill is often paired with gravlax and other cured and smoked fish. The blooms and seed-bearing umbels are often used in dill pickles. The dried seeds have many applications, but are most commonly used in pickles. Dill weed is available dried, but it tends not to have any flavor.

Growing Your Own. Dill is among the easiest of herbs to grow and will readily grow from seed in any reasonably fertile soil. If you let some of the flowers go to seed, dill will reseed itself year after year.

Duck Egg Omelette with Dill and Queso Quesadilla

This recipe pays homage to my maternal grandmother who would send me to her garden to pick fresh dill in the morning. Next thing I know, there would be a heaping plateful of scrambled eggs with dill and cheddar cheese on her table. Eggs and dill are therefore one of my go-to comfort foods.

If you don't have duck eggs, substitute three chicken eggs for every two duck eggs. Queso quesadilla is a mild, white melting cheese. Great substitutes would be Monterrey Jack or Fontina.

2 duck eggs (or 3 large chicken eggs)
2 tablespoons dill weed, chopped
Salt and pepper to taste
½ cup (2 ounces) grated queso quesadilla (or other mild cheese)
1 tablespoon unsalted butter

Whip the eggs, the dill, and a pinch each of salt and pepper with a fork until well combined. Heat an omelette pan (at the restaurant, I use black steel, well seasoned; you should use a small non-stick pan at home) over medium high heat and add the butter. Let the butter melt and heat until it stops sizzling. Swirl the pan to ensure that it is well coated with butter and pour in the eggs. Wait for 30 to 45 seconds to let the bottom start setting up, then with a steady circular motion of your fork, tines up, draw the cooked egg from the sides and bottom to the center of the pan, letting raw egg take its place. Do this until the eggs are just about set all over.

Then, lifting the handle of the pan, shake the eggs toward the side opposite the handle. When they are bunched up against the side, place the grated cheese in the center and fold the omelet in half over the cheese with another shake of the pan (this takes practice) or with your fork. Serve immediately. Perfect omelettes for restaurant service take a bit of practice, but for home service, your mistakes are perfectly tasty! Don't be afraid of omelettes; it's a good technique to master.



OREGANO

There are many, many strains of oregano (*Origanum vulgare*) and marjoram (*Origanum majorana*) on the market and they all vary slightly in flavor. Marjoram is typically milder than oregano. The combination of oregano, garlic, and lemon is classically Greek; oregano, garlic, and sour orange are classically Cuban.

Flavor Profile. Oregano is assertive and aromatic, so use a light hand with this herb. It has a bitter aftertaste that can be overwhelming when used in large quantities.

Preparation. Strip the leaves from the hairy stems and chop finely. Include whole sprigs in bouquets garnis. This herb dries well and I wouldn't hesitate to use dried oregano in place of fresh in the winter.

How to Use. I use oregano primarily in flavoring Greek dishes and in general herb mixes, but it's also a key ingredient in many Caribbean dishes, especially in Cuban mojos. I do not like oregano in tomato sauces: it reminds me too much of poorly made, canned pizza sauce.

Growing Your Own. Oregano is a perennial herb that grows easily enough in a warm location. The foliage dies back in the winter and regrows in the spring. Prune the woody dead stems in late winter, if you didn't harvest them all in the late fall for drying.



Grilled Mojo-Marinated Shrimp

A mojo is a traditional Cuban marinade used for a variety of meats and seafood. Every cook's mojo is slightly different. I use sour or Seville oranges when I have them—they taste like orange, lime, and a touch of tangerine. Otherwise, for every three sour oranges, I substitute two sweet oranges and one lime.

juice of 3 sour oranges, about 5 fluid ounces
zest of one sour orange
½ cup (4 fluid ounces) extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons (1 ounce) garlic, finely minced
2 tablespoons fresh oregano, finely minced
¾ teaspoon ground cumin
salt and black pepper, to taste
1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined, tail on



Place all ingredients except for the shrimp in a bowl and mix well. Toss the mojo with the shrimp and let stand for 10-15 minutes (much longer than this and you are going to have shrimp seviche). Grill the shrimp until just done.
Serves four.

I like to serve this in a big soup plate with a very smooth purée of black bean soup in the well of the plate and a *tostón* (twice-fried green plantain) on top of that. Next I spoon a fruit salsa such as my [Persimmon Salsa](#) on top of the *tostón* and arrange several grilled shrimp around that, tail up and out towards the rim of the plate. While the shrimp is grilling, I will reduce a bit of the mojo in a sauce pan and then spoon it over the shrimp once plated. A big sprig of fresh oregano in the center completes the garnish.

PARSLEY

We're all familiar with parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*) and its bright flavor. We only use flat leaf parsley, also known as Italian parsley, at the restaurant. Not only is it easier to chop, but it has more flavor than curly parsley.

Flavor Profile. Mild and bright, parsley is perhaps the most commonly used herb in the United States.

Preparation. Strip the leaves from the stems and chop finely. Save the stems for the stockpot.

How to Use. Add parsley at the last moment to bring a touch of freshness to a dish, such as boiled new potatoes. Parsley also stars as a vegetable in its own right in many Middle Eastern salads. Very few dishes require cooked parsley although parsley stems are often included in *bouquets garnis*.

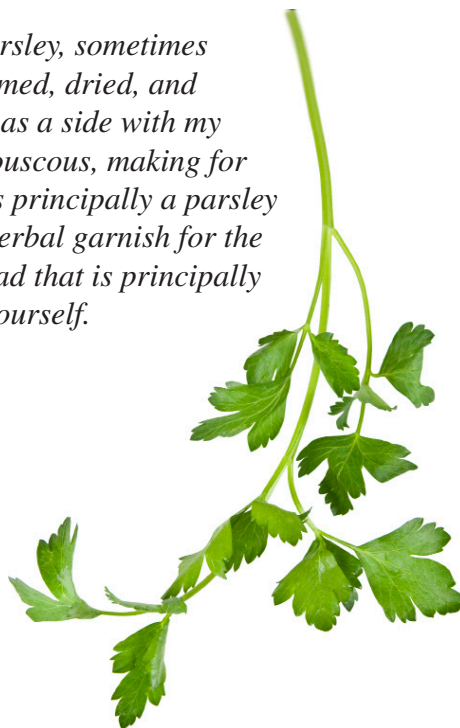
Growing Your Own. Although parsley grows easily from seed, I prefer to start with plants from the nursery so that I have fresh parsley for a longer season. Parsley is a biennial, but it is pretty useless in its second year—all its effort goes into bolting. Replant every spring.



Couscous in the Style of Tabouleh

Tabouleh is a salad made traditionally of parsley, sometimes mint, and bulghur (wheat that has been steamed, dried, and cracked). I sought to refine the dish to serve as a side with my lamb chops by replacing the bulghur with couscous, making for a lighter dish. In the Arab world, tabouleh is principally a parsley salad; in the West, the parsley becomes an herbal garnish for the wheat salad. I prefer a middle ground, a salad that is principally wheat with a large amount of parsley. Suit yourself.

2 cups (16 ounces) couscous
½ teaspoon salt
2 cups boiling water
1 bunch Italian parsley
1 large tomato
1 bunch green onions (about 10)
½ cup fresh lemon juice (2-3 lemons)
½ cup extra virgin olive oil



Put the couscous into a small heatproof dish, stir the salt into the boiling water, and pour over the couscous. Cover the dish with film and let it steep while you prep the rest of the garnishes. Strip the parsley from the stems and chop it fine. Dice the tomato and slice the green onions. Juice the lemons and mix the juice with the olive oil. The couscous will be tender after about five minutes. Uncover the couscous, fluff with a fork, add all the remaining ingredients, mix well, and season to taste with salt, pepper, and more lemon juice and olive oil as necessary.

Serves four.

This is a great accompaniment to grilled chicken or lamb chops. I might slice several large heirloom tomatoes over the couscous, top it with a bit of feta cheese and olives, and serve it as a light summer vegetarian dinner.

ROSEMARY

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is a classic Mediterranean herb and a natural with lamb and in meat sauces. I love to roast chickens and potatoes with rosemary.

Flavor Profile. Rosemary is a highly assertive herb with a resiny flavor that can be bitter, so use it sparingly.

Preparation. Most people do not find eating rosemary leaves to be pleasant (they're tough and really pungent), so I either leave them whole so that people can pick around them, or I mince them very fine. Strip the leaves by grasping the tip of the rosemary in one hand and with the other stripping all the leaves in a single motion from the tip to the base. Put whole rosemary sprigs in *bouquets garnis*.

How to Use. Rosemary and lamb is an amazing combination. I always include rosemary in my ossobuco and other slow braises such as lamb stews and shanks. When grilling, I like to toss a few sprigs of rosemary on the coals or ceramic briquettes to flavor whatever I am grilling. And I often throw whole sprigs in with roast chickens, roast potatoes, and other roasted vegetable dishes. Rosemary is one of the herbs that dries successfully, but because it is evergreen, I use fresh all year.

Growing Your Own. Rosemary is a perennial evergreen shrub that wants warm weather and can tolerate both drought and poor soil. Count yourself lucky if you live where you can grow it. In the US, there are some cold-tolerant cultivars that might survive zone 6 winters, if you're very lucky. Over a period of years, I was able to select and propagate a strain that consistently wintered over for me (on a sheltered southwest-facing wall here in northernmost Virginia) and ultimately got four bushes to be about five feet tall. Then we remodeled the house and the bulldozer got them before I could move them: a sad day that was.



Braised Lamb Shanks with Rosemary Gremolata

This recipe showcases rosemary in a gremolata, a traditional garnish for ossobuco, and in a braise of lamb shanks.

Rosemary Gremolata

Gremolata is a traditional ossobuco garnish of finely minced garlic, parsley, and lemon zest. I like to substitute one third fresh rosemary for one third of the traditional parsley for a gremolata to pair with lamb.

zest of one lemon, finely minced
1 tablespoon fresh rosemary, finely minced
2 tablespoons Italian parsley, finely minced
3 garlic cloves, finely minced

Mix all ingredients well and serve immediately. (cont'd)

Braised Lamb Shanks

Lamb shanks slow-cooked until they are fork tender are a glorious thing. If you can't find shanks, shoulder chops or kebabs will do nicely, just reduce the cooking time accordingly.

vegetable oil
4 lamb shanks
Flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
2 carrots, diced
2 leeks, diced
1 large onion, diced
2 celery stalks, diced
2 cups diced tomatoes
3 tablespoons garlic, minced
bouquet garni of rosemary, thyme, parsley, and sage
red wine

To braise successfully, you should have a heavy ovenproof pan with a tightly fitting lid. Preheat the oven to slow, 275-300F. Heat the braising pan over medium heat and film with oil. Dredge the lamb shanks in the seasoned flour and brown on all sides. Remove the lamb from the pan.

Add the carrots, leeks, onion, and celery to the pan and sauté for a couple of minutes. Add the garlic and bouquet garni and cook for another couple of minutes. Add the tomatoes and stir. Place the lamb shanks back in the pan and add sufficient red wine to come a third of the way up the shanks. Cover and bring to a slow boil.

Place the covered pan in the oven and cook until the shanks are very tender but not falling off the bone, about three hours. Check the liquid level every hour or so to ensure that the pan does not go dry. Add water as necessary.

Once done, remove the shanks from the pan and skim the fat from the sauce. Reduce as necessary to yield a thick sauce. Remove the bouquet garni and season to taste with salt and pepper.

I like to put a mound of soft polenta in the bottom of a large soup plate with the lamb shank standing in the polenta. Then I drizzle the sauce over and around the lamb shank and polenta. A sprinkle of rosemary gremolata will finish the dish.

Serves four.



SAGE

Sage is one of those herbs that nobody seems to know what to do with and whose use is more common in Europe than in the United States. In the United States, sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is one of the classic Southern poultry herbs along with thyme. It's also the primary flavoring in most breakfast sausages.

Flavor Profile. Sage is really potent when fresh and even more potent when dried. It has a slightly musty, slightly spicy flavor.

Preparation. Sage leaves are used whole in bouquets garnis, fried whole for garnish, or very finely minced for seasoning. More frequently, we use dried sage, called "rubbed sage" for seasoning various dishes during cooking.

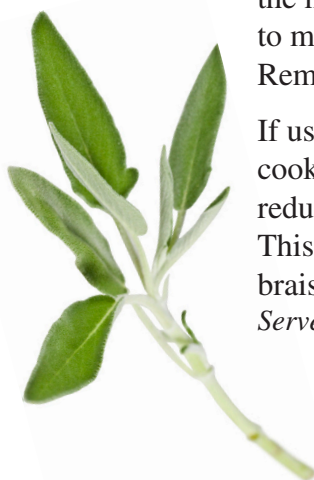
How to Use. Sage needs to cook with the dish to impart flavor; it is rarely used as a last minute seasoning herb. Think white meat when you think sage: veal, pork, rabbit, and chicken. Sage features prominently in my poultry dressings, in dirty rice, in my Southern style sausage, and I stuff it into the cavities of chickens that I roast. Sometimes I put whole sage leaves under the skin of chickens to be roasted. Sage is also prominent in Northern Italian cooking and I love it with veal and in white beans. Sage is one of the few herbs that I like better dried than fresh. I generally chop the fresh leaves fairly fine.

Growing Your Own. Sage is a perennial evergreen shrub that grows easily with no care and can be easily divided. Prune the woody stalks back in late winter to keep its growth in check.

Veal Tenderloin Medallions with Prosciutto and Sage

If you have access to good veal, good for you. If you don't, use pork tenderloin or turkey or chicken breast medallions in this recipe. Also, you may not have time to make your own demiglace or might not have access to commercial demiglace. For a substitute, use a bit of any meat broth. You could also use butter, in which case squeeze a little lemon juice in the sauce to brighten it.

16 ounces veal tenderloin
Wondra or plain flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
8-10 leaves of sage, finely sliced
4 slices prosciutto
4 teaspoons veal demiglace
splash of water



Remove any silverskin from the veal tenderloins and slice them into 16 medallions. Heat a large sauté pan over high heat and film with vegetable oil. Dredge the veal in the flour and shake off the excess. Cook the veal for about a minute. Add the sage and prosciutto. Turn the medallions and after 30 seconds, add the demiglace, stirring to melt. If the sauce is not liquid enough, add a splash of water. Remove the meat to hot plates and pour the sauce over.

If using meat broth rather than demiglace, after the medallions have cooked, remove them from the pan and keep them warm. Continue reducing the sauce over high heat until it is as thick as you want it. This would make an excellent meal with a little risotto and some braised rapini.
Serves four.



TARRAGON

Tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*) is another of the classic *fines herbes* from France. It goes well with both poultry and fish and is the key flavoring ingredient in sauce Béarnaise (which I detest).

Flavor Profile. An assertive herb with a definite licorice flavor, tarragon wants to be used sparingly. I like to call tarragon the “herb that slew 1000 dishes.”

Preparation. Strip the leaves from the stems and chop finely. Tarragon is also commonly steeped in white wine vinegar for several days to flavor the vinegar.

How to Use. Add sparingly to mild dishes as part of *fines herbes* or on its own. I most commonly use it to flavor eggs, poultry, rabbit, and above all, fish.

Growing Your Own. Tarragon grows easily in temperate climates. It will die back every winter and come back the next spring. The plant divides easily and is extremely low maintenance.



Warm Grilled Chicken Salad with Tarragon, White Grapes, and Pecans

This is a summer variation on the immensely popular Warm Grilled Chicken Salad from our lunch menu. Unlike many chicken salads, this is dressed with a vinaigrette rather than a mayonnaise, so it is a lighter dish.

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
1 lemon, sliced into rounds
1-1/2 tablespoons tarragon, minced, divided use
5 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided use
1 tablespoon tarragon vinegar
1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard
salt and pepper to taste
1-1/2 cups (8 ounces) white grapes, halved
1 cup (3.5 ounces) pecans, toasted
Baby salad greens for four people



Marinate the chicken with the lemon rounds, one tablespoon of the minced tarragon, and 2 tablespoons of oil for at least 20 minutes or even overnight.

Make the vinaigrette by whisking together the remaining tarragon, tarragon vinegar, mustard, and remaining oil until emulsified. Grill the chicken until done and cube while still warm. Place the chicken, grapes, and pecans in a bowl and dress with half the vinaigrette.

Dress the baby greens with the remaining half the vinaigrette. Place the dressed greens in a large soup plate and spoon the chicken salad over.

Serves four.

THAI BASIL

One of my darling herbs, Thai basil (*Ocimum basilicum* var. *thyrsiflora*) is an indispensable component of many Thai dishes and is a catchall name for a variety of basil, most of which have purple stems and small dark green leaves.

Flavor Profile. Thai basil tastes to me like a cross between mint and black pepper. In fact, on the rare occasion when I don't have any Thai basil, I substitute a little regular basil, a little mint, and some black pepper.

Preparation. I pinch the young shoots and put them whole into many dishes. Thai basil leaves are often so small that you can leave them whole, but you can also chiffonade them like regular basil.

How to Use. I use Thai basil in Thai stir fries, curries, soups, fried rice, and so forth. Thai basil, along with cilantro, is *de rigueur* in table salads served with many Thai and Vietnamese dishes. Thai basil, like other basil, is almost never cooked for long in a dish. It is either added at the end of cooking or at the table.

Growing Your Own. Thai basil is easy to grow from seed once the soil gets warm. It's a tender tropical herb that does not tolerate cold and like all basil is much better when young and has not yet flowered.



Thai Fried Rice with Roasted Pork

Here's a simple dish that shows off Thai basil. No two batches are the same because this is another clean out the refrigerator dish. Not only is this fried rice great for staff meals at the restaurant, it's great for kids of all ages.

Essential Fried Rice Paste

Many Thai dishes start with a paste fried in oil and this fried rice dish is no different. The pastes are made in large granite mortars with heavy pestles. I use one at home. At the restaurant, we use our huge commercial blender which will liquefy anything in seconds.

- 1 bunch cilantro, preferably with roots
- 1 bunch Thai basil
- 3 shallots, peeled and roughly chopped
- 2 tablespoons white peppercorns (or 1 tablespoon ground white pepper) (cont'd)

Remove the stems and roots from the cilantro and Thai basil and roughly chop them. Reserve the leaves (for the fried rice recipe below, for example). Pound all the ingredients to a paste in a mortar, or do the best that you can with a blender (in which case, start with ground white pepper). If you need to add liquid to get the blender to work, add vegetable oil.

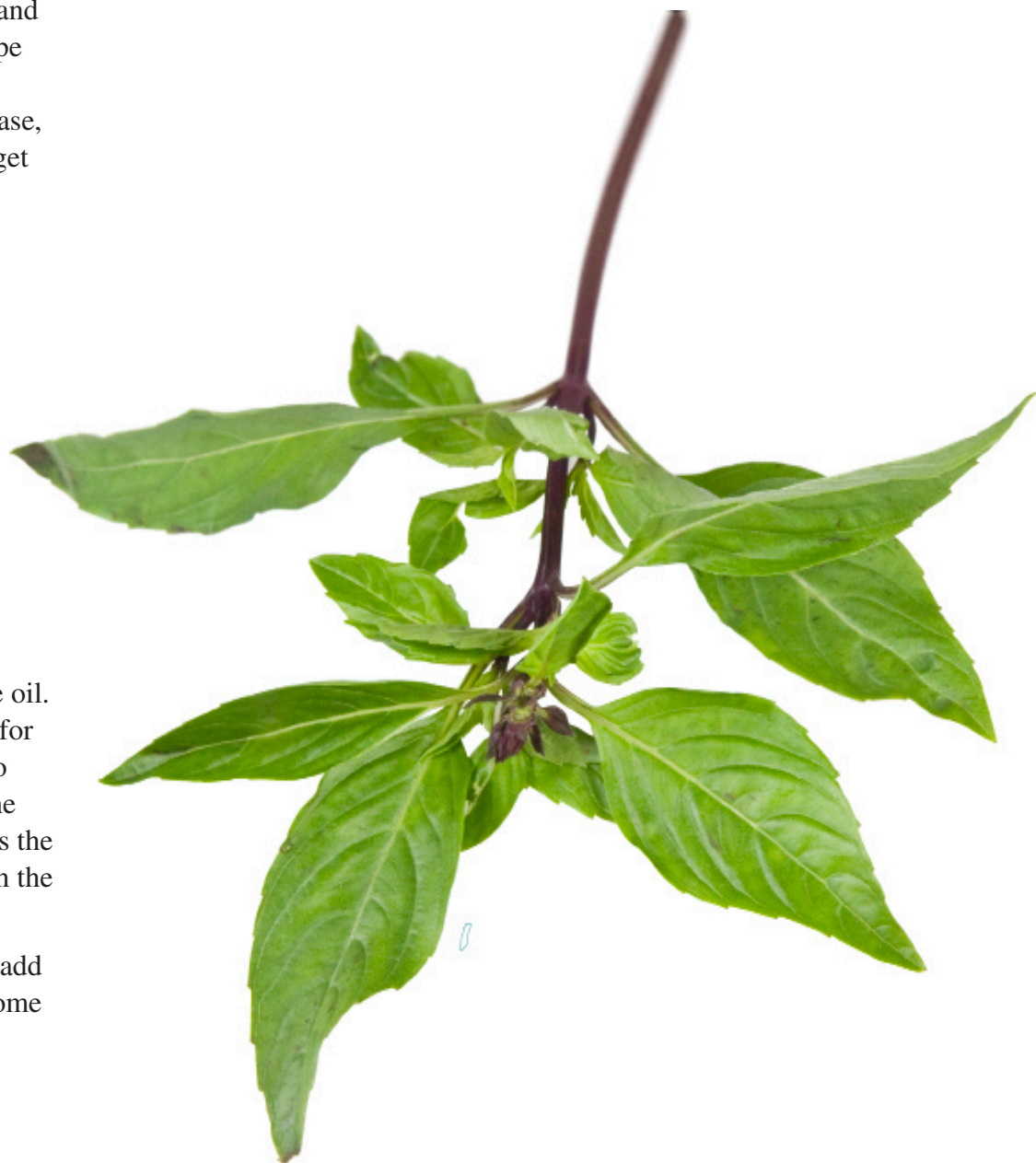
Thai Fried Rice

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 tablespoon essential fried rice paste
1 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
½ cup each of various vegetables (diced carrots, green onions, cherry tomatoes, baby corn, long beans, etc.)
1 cup roasted pork, diced
3 cups cold cooked long-grained rice
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 cup whole cilantro leaves
1 cup whole Thai basil leaves

Heat a large sauté pan or wok over high heat and then add the oil. Add the fried rice paste and black pepper. Stir well and cook for a minute or so. Then add any raw ingredients that you want to cook (such as carrots). When they are cooked, add the rice, the pork, and any ingredients that just need to be warmed, such as the tomatoes. Stir well. Add fish sauce to taste. When done, stir in the fresh herbs off the heat and serve immediately.

The white pepper in the fried rice paste and the black pepper add a surprising amount of spice. Should you want more, make some *nam prik*, sliced Thai bird chiles in fish sauce, to spoon over according to your tolerance for heat.

Serves four.



THYME

Were I asked to choose five flavorings to bring to a deserted island, the first four are no contest: salt, pepper, thyme, and garlic. I like thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) so much that I cannot think of cooking without it. And it is the one herb I can count on year round. It's always in the garden, even under the snow.

Flavor Profile. Thyme has a mild, herbaceous, and slightly lemony flavor all its own from the essential oil thymol.

Preparation. Thyme leaves are easily stripped from the stalks by pulling from the root end to the tip. If the tips of the stems are tender, they may come off with the leaves, in which case, lightly chop them before use.

How to Use. Thyme is almost always cooked into dishes and is rarely used as a finishing herb. Thyme is one of the quintessential poultry herbs and I rarely roast a chicken without a healthy sprinkle of fresh thyme leaves and a bunch of sprigs stuffed into the body cavity. And I always cook wild mushrooms with thyme. Thyme features in all my herb marinades and bouquets garnis. I don't use dried thyme because it can be really strong and bitter.

Growing Your Own. Thyme is easy to grow in full sun and tolerates poor soils well. There are dozens of cultivars, each with its own flavor. Plant several and try them out. My all-time favorite was a variegated thyme (lemon yellow margins on dark green leaves). Sadly, it died without my being able to divide it. Although perennial, the plants don't seem to last much beyond three years, so you should plan on dividing and/or replacing them regularly.



Grilled Pork Loin with Apples, Thyme, and Honey

This recipe shows that apples respond well to savory seasonings. Think about all those German and Alsatian dishes of apples with caraway and/or juniper berries. The execution of this recipe, like all simple recipes, depends entirely on the quality of the ingredients. You'll want to buy the best local heritage pork that you can find, along with the best local apples and local unpasteurized honey. In season, I like to use Blushing Golden apples because they are one of the finest cooking and eating apples that I know. Look for a crisp apple with good flavor and excellent acidity. You'll have better luck at a farmer's market; rarely are you going to find such an apple at a supermarket. (cont'd)

4 slices of ¾ inch- (2 cm-) thick center-cut, boneless pork loin
vegetable oil
salt and pepper
1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves, divided use
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
2 heirloom apples, in slices
honey

Rub each slice of pork loin with oil and sprinkle with salt, pepper, and half the thyme. Heat a sauté pan over medium high heat and film with oil. Cook the pork until it is nicely browned on the bottom, about three minutes. Flip the pork and cook it on the other side until the it just firms up in the center, another 2-3 minutes. If in doubt, cut open the pork and look at it. You want it just slightly pink, about 130F.

Remove the pork from the pan and put it aside to rest in a warm location. Add the butter to the pan and once it melts, add the apples and brown them. Add the other half of the fresh thyme, salt, and honey to taste. Spoon the apples over the pork and serve. If you would like a little pan sauce, add a shot of Calvados or brandy to the apples and flame, then add a tablespoon or so of water and let it reduce until syrupy.

Serves Four.



Thanks to the kitchen crew at [One Block West](http://OneBlockWest.com) for testing these recipes.

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