

Herb Vinegars

Herbal vinegars are one of the great ways to use and enjoy many easily grown herbs. They are useful, have few calories, and make wonderful gifts. There are many combinations, but the fundamentals are the same for most vinegars. White wine vinegar or apple cider vinegar is the most often used and makes the best base. Regular white vinegar is strong for delicate and mellow flavoring that herbs impart.

Since vinegar is a preservative it is relatively safe to use and keep at room temperature. It is important that any additions to the base vinegar be as clean as possible. All additions should be washed and dried before adding to the vinegar. My favorite method is pick herbs early, rinse in a container of water, and dry on paper towels. Pick off any bad leaves and remove thick stems. Methods vary, but chopping or bruising the herbs and placing them in a container of stainless steel is the one I prefer. I use about a cup of herbs to one gallon of vinegar. Heat just to boiling but **DO NOT BOIL**. Pour it into a glass jar and cover it with plastic wrap then the lid. Store in a cool dark place for about 10 days. The vinegar is then ready to bottle and use.

Possible combinations for vinegar using herbs that are easy to grow are as follows:

- Basil and garlic
- Burnet and tarragon
- Lemon herbs such as lemon verbena, lemon thyme, lemon basil, and lemon balm. Garlic can be added to this
- Oregano, Mexican mint marigold and garlic
- Mixed (but not all herbs will work) Thyme, tarragon, burnet, chives, oregano, sage, dill, savory.

In general, Rosemary and fennel should be used with care as they have a very strong distinctive flavor. They are good for meat marinades, and fennel is especially good for fish.

Bottling vinegar.

When the vinegar has aged it is time to bottle. Clear or light green jars and bottles make the best containers. Hobby stores often have decorative bottles, but wine bottles, salad dressing bottles, or any bottle with a narrow neck will do. Corks are best used and can be bought in assortments at hobby stores. A small funnel is a must with clean pieces of cheesecloth to strain. Stems, leaves, garlic cloves, small red peppers, and herb flowers add to the flavor and appearance of the vinegar. A long handled wooden spoon and a skewer are helpful to place the herbs in the bottles. Pick only perfect herbs and wash and dry them well before you are ready to bottle.

Strain the vinegar from the large jar through a mesh sieve into a measuring cup or small pitcher that pours easily. Place herbs, garlic, flowers, etc. into the bottle. Line the funnel with cheesecloth and strain vinegar through it. Use tight fitting corks and store in a cool, dim place. Be sure herbs in the bottle are completely covered. Although vinegar is decorative on a windowsill, it should be used often if kept there as it will fade and lose flavor sooner in bright light.

