

Teas, Soups, and Other Foods

By Bobbi Gustafson

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Grow your own ingredients for teas, soups and more.

Your garden can grow more than the common vegetables found in every western Washington backyard. With the right choices of herbs and other ingredients, you can make your own teas, soups and a variety of other dishes. Here are a few of my favorites.

Teas

Camellia sinensis is the real tea plant—the very same one that was dumped overboard during the Boston Tea party! It grows very well here. To make green tea from this plant, let leaves wilt for a couple of hours, then roll them in your hands to rupture the cells. Steam them for 10 minutes in a vegetable steamer, then dry them.

Want more tea options? Here's a list of herbs that are mild enough for anyone to use for herb tea:

Chamomile	Spearmint	Peppermint	Huckleberry leaf
Melissa	Blueberry leaf	Blackberry leaf	Calendula flowers
Lavender	Lime Thyme	Rose hips	Mallow flowers

Pour boiling water over any combination of the above herbs. Steep 5 to 10 minutes and strain. You may drink your steeped tea as is, or you can add berries, or squeeze lemons or lime into it. Add the tea to juices, add honey while it's warm or add pure maple syrup. Honey is good for you, but never feed anything sweetened with honey to a child under 1 year old.

Your choices for using tea herbs abound:

Make your own lemonade with tea. Juice eight washed and dried apples and two peeled lemons. Then brew any of the teas above in one cup of boiling water and cool. Add tea and ice.

For a refreshing drink, juice six apples and four romaine leaves. Add mint tea.

Steep chamomile, spearmint and rosehips together. Slightly sweeten with honey if desired. Drink hot or cold.

Blueberry leaf is a great blood sugar regulator. Mix it with Melissa or huckleberry leaf, add some mallow or rose hips.

A tea made with freshly picked herbs is called an infusion. Crush herbs and pour boiling water over them. Steep till the water turns green. Lift out the herbs and sip. One of my favorite infusion combinations is a small spring each of lavender, chamomile, mint, rosemary, basil, Melissa and sage.

Dinnertime

Evening meals can be even better with the right herbs from your garden, and meal preparation can become even more of a bonding time: Kids love to grind herbs for you with a mortar and pestle while you talk to them. For new tastes at dinner, try growing these herbs for soups, salads and main dishes:

Parsley	Sage	Rosemary	Thyme
Chives	Winter Savory	Basil	French Tarragon
Oregano	French Sorrel	Lovage	Curry
Garlic	Onions	Shallots	Leeks
Summer Savory	Fennel	Cilantro	Dill
Hot red pepper	Celery	Bay leaf (not digestable)	

Ginger and turmeric root can be grown indoors.

Plant herbs in a sunny place near your kitchen, and sprinkle a little dolomite lime or lime chips around the rosemary, basil and dill. Plant cilantro, which is slow to bolt. And don't worry about your soil quality, in this case: Herbs grow in poor soil; their struggle makes them tasty.



Kiauni Jones, a 17-year-old culinary student at Cascades Job Corps in Sedro-Woolley, pauses with rosemary, a popular addition to soups, salads and main dishes. Photo by Bobbi Gustafson

Here are some dinner ideas for herbs:

Thom's Greek Kabobs

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup lemon juice
¼ cup honey
4 cloves garlic, minced
½ small onion, minced
1/3 cup minced parsley leaves

1-2/3 teaspoon minced rosemary leaves
1-2/3 teaspoon minced oregano leaves
2 pounds boneless skinless chicken breast
16 eight-inch skewers
Salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Slice chicken in strips. Marinade in mixture. Soak skewers in water. Thread chicken onto skewer and barbecue.

Try burgers with ground oregano, winter savory and garlic (optional: white cheese and mushrooms!)

Make your own healthy sausage. To 1½ to 2 lbs of ground turkey, add:

2 tbsp ground sage
¼ tsp oregano
¼ tsp winter savory
1/8 tsp crushed red pepper
2 tbsp sea salt

1 tsp black pepper
1 tbsp crushed, finely minced garlic
1 tbsp organic cane sugar
2 tbsp cold water

Mix and refrigerate a short while. Fry in patties.

Use dry, canned or frozen soups as a base and add any number of fresh or dried herbs and fresh veggies. Example: Tomato soup (without MSG). Add water, milk or chicken stock. Add diced fresh tomatoes. Sauté onion and basil to add to the mix. Grind oregano and thyme and add that too. Like garlic? Add some!

To chicken broth, add tumeric, parsley, onion, garlic, thyme.

Bouquet Garni (for beef soup):

¼ cup dried parsley
2 tablespoons dried thyme
2 tablespoons dried bay leaf
2 tablespoons dried rosemary (optional)
1 leek

Combine in cheese cloth, tie closed, steep in soup and remove.



A few key purchases will give you the tools you need to grind, bundle, sift and strain herbs for teas and soups.

Photo by Bobbi Gustafson

A few words of caution for pregnant and lactating women: Sage and fennel should not be eaten. Five stalks of celery may have the anti-inflammatory effect of ibuprofen on most people; pregnant women should be aware of this. Last, the use of rosemary should be limited to cooking, rather than for medicinal purposes.

You can be a gourmet cook on a shoestring budget. All you have to do is start collecting the herbs named in the article. A good place to start is the Master Gardener Plant Faire, on May 10, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Find out more at www.skagit.wsu.edu/MG/plantfaire.htm.