



## Drying Herbs<sup>1</sup>

Susan Reynolds, M.S.<sup>2</sup>

Drying is the easiest method of preserving herbs. Simply expose the leaves, flowers or seeds to warm, dry air. Leave the herbs in a well-ventilated area until the moisture evaporates. Sun, oven and dehydrator drying are not recommended because the herbs can lose flavor and color.

The best time to harvest most herbs for drying is just before the flowers first open when they are in the bursting bud stage. Gather the herbs in the early morning after the dew has evaporated to minimize wilting. Avoid bruising the leaves. They should not lie in the sun or unattended after harvesting. Rinse herbs in cool water and gently shake to remove excess moisture. Discard all bruised, soiled or imperfect leaves and stems.

### LESS TENDER HERBS

The more sturdy herbs such as sage, thyme, summer savory and parsley are the easiest to dry. They can be tied into small bundles and air dried. Air drying outdoors is often possible; however better color and flavor retention usually results from drying indoors.

### TENDER-LEAF HERBS

Basil, tarragon, lemon balm and the mints have a high moisture content and will mold if not dried quickly. Try hanging the tender-leaf herbs or those with seeds inside paper bags to dry. Tear or punch holes in the sides of the bag. Suspend a small bunch (large amounts will mold) of herbs in a bag and close the top with a rubber band. Place where air currents will circulate through the bag. Any leaves and seeds that fall off will be caught in the bottom of the bag.

Another method, especially nice for mint, sage or bay leaf, is to dry the leaves separately. Remove the best leaves from the stems. Lay the leaves on a paper towel, without allowing leaves to touch. Cover with another towel and layer of leaves. Five layers may be dried at one time using this method. Dry in a very cool oven. The oven light of an electric range or the pilot light of a gas range furnishes enough heat for overnight drying. Leaves dry flat and retain a good color.

When the leaves are crispy dry and crumple easily between the fingers, they are ready to be packaged and stored. Dried leaves may be left whole and

1. This document is Fact Sheet FCS 8505, a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: June 1998. First published: February 1994. Reviewed: June 1998.
2. Written by Susan Reynolds, M.S., former Extension Foods Specialist, University of Georgia, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Athens. Reviewed for use in Florida by Mark L. Tamplin, associate professor, Food Safety Specialist, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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crumpled as used, or coarsely crumpled before storage. Husks can be removed from seeds by rubbing the seeds between the hands and blowing away the chaff. Place herbs in airtight containers and store in a cool, dry dark area to protect color and fragrance.

Microwave ovens are a fast way to dry herbs when only small quantities are to be prepared. Follow the directions that come with your microwave.