



HOW TO DRY HERBS AT HOME

The Ultimate Guide To Drying Herbs



Urban Cheapskate Mom

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By Urban Cheapskate Mom

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Introduction

Many, many moons ago, you couldn't walk into a kitchen or storage room without seeing clumps of green herbs hanging upside down. The area smelled wonderful and it instantly made a person hungry. Nowadays, you won't find that scene in most kitchens. Sure, you may see some potted herbs in the windows, but gone are the days when homes were naturally freshened with drying herbs.

Do you remember walking into your grandmother's kitchen and marvelling at the clumps of green and wondering why she had "weeds" hanging in her kitchen? Back then, our ancestors appreciated doing things by hand. They had a real knack for taking care of what they needed at home and didn't rely on the grocery stores to provide them with every little thing they needed to cook with. It was a simpler time and our grandmas and great-grandmas lived frugally.

We have gotten away from those methods. Now, anytime we need something, even something so simple like thyme for our roast, we run to the store and spend money to buy it. What a sad waste of money. Sure, it is only a couple of dollars here and there, but what if you could put that money to something else. Why spend the money when you can take care of your spice needs at home for free?

This book will help you navigate the drying of the herbs and spices you grow in your garden, whether it is a big garden outside or a few potted plants in your window sill. Drying herbs is a fun, potentially profitable hobby that will make your house smell great while saving you money on your own spice needs!

Chapter 1: What Herb Drying Actually Is

Herb drying is just as it sounds. It is a way for you to take advantage of your prolific herbs by preserving the excess. Most people cannot possibly use their fresh herbs before they start to wilt or go to seed (some herbs produce seeds you will want to preserve). By drying the herbs, you can use herbs from your garden for months, possibly years to come.

Drying herbs is the only way you can use everything you grow. It is super easy to do and can be done all year round. Drying herbs is pretty straightforward. How you dry the herbs depends on the type of herb you are going to preserve, which we will address in the following chapters.

We dry herbs to keep them from developing bacteria. As you probably know, bacteria is the problem we face when trying to preserve food. All food has some moisture content. To make that food safe to sit on our shelves, we need to remove as much of the moisture content as possible to inhibit bacteria growth. You can safely store your dried herbs on your shelves for years once they have gone through the drying process. However, many people have discovered the potency of the herbs tends to waver after six to twelve months. It has a lot to do with the harvesting, drying and storing. One wrong move and you will shorten the shelf life of your dried herbs.

We don't freeze or can herbs, which leaves drying for preservation. Although some people will attempt to freeze some herbs, they just don't have the same flavour quality as a dried herb. And canning is simply not an option. You can add fresh herbs, like dill, to your canning recipes, but canning an herb alone is simply not an option. Drying is your best bet and it is so easy, it just make sense.

The process of drying herbs can be done several different ways. The key is to go through the process slowly in order to maintain the best quality. Some herbs are naturally dry and will take very little time to completely dry out and be ready for storage. Other herbs hold more water and are prone to moulding if they are not dried quick enough.

Chapter 2: The Benefits Of Herb Drying At Home

The herbs you dry in your own home are not only incredibly inexpensive, they will be much more aromatic and powerful than the herbs you buy in the store. Your dishes will be more enhanced when you use the herbs that you have dried. Your home-dried herbs will be much fresher than those you would buy at your local market, which means they will pack more punch. You will need less spice to achieve that flavour you love with your store-bought spices.

You are also getting the crucial benefit of knowing exactly what it is in that is in that bottle of seasoning. Most gardeners will leave their herb gardens free of pesticides. Fertilizer is typically not needed, which means your herbs will be completely organic. You can use natural compost to help the plants thrive if you want. Chicken manure is an excellent natural fertilizer that will add nitrogen to the soil, which increases the leaf production in plants. Pesticides are not needed for herb gardens. The pungent smell of the plants acts as a natural repellent that keeps most bugs and pests away. You will need to do some moderate control and may need to remove slugs if the soil is excessively wet during the spring months.

Because herbs are prolific and continue to grow even after you have harvested some of the leaves, you will have a steady supply of herbs. You can opt to use the plants fresh from the garden to save your dried supply or dry as you harvest. Many herbs are very hardy and can be started in early spring. The plants will be ready to harvest in a few short weeks and will continue to produce throughout the summer. Most of the plants will stay alive until the first hard freeze. Herbs are self-seeding, meaning, as the plants grow and mature, they drop seeds and new plants will pop up. Rarely will you need to buy new seeds once you have established your herb garden.

When you choose to grow and dry your own herbs, you will gain a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. It is an amazing feeling to

go out to your garden and pluck the food you will feed your family. You get the chance to pick the best leaves and leave any that are wilted behind. When you dry your own herbs, you have complete control over the quality of the herbs. You don't have to worry about other weeds and plants getting tossed into the mix.

If you were not already aware, herbs and spices have numerous medicinal qualities, which is why many people choose to grow them in the first place. If you or a family member is having trouble sleeping, some chamomile flowers steeped in water will help you rest. Lemon balm can be used to treat wounds topically or taken as a tea to relieve an upset stomach. Prolific parsley relieves indigestion as well as peppermint leaves steeped in water. There are plenty of things you can grow in your herb garden that will make your food taste great and your body a little healthier.

Make sure you get your kids involved. It is a skill they will be able to pass down to their own children. Home food preservation is a dying skill that needs to be reintroduced! We can teach our children some cost-saving ways that will benefit them in the future.

Chapter 3: The Different Methods Of Herb Drying

There are 3 common methods of drying herbs, but herb drying isn't limited to those three ways. We will discuss the most common three and touch on a few of the other ways you can go about preserving your garden's bounty. Basically, you want your herbs to dry at 100 degrees. Because most of us do not keep our homes this warm, you may need to consider other methods.

Hanging/Air-Dry



This is one of the most common methods of drying herbs. It allows the herbs to dry slowly while creating a lovely aroma in your house. The herbs are hung upside down either in a paper bag or without and allowed to dry for anywhere from 1 to 2 weeks depending on the size of the bunch that is drying and the type of plant. Some plants contain more moisture than others. This is a risky adventure. If your home is too cool, the herbs will take too long to dry and you risk mould growth. We will discuss how you can prevent that in the next chapter.

Dehydrator



This is a quick and easy way to dry a variety of herbs within a few hours. You will want to choose a dehydrator that has trays designed to catch the small particles of the herb plant that will crumble and fall through the slots in the tray. This method is a favourite, but you do risk losing some of your herbs due to the drying method being rather fast. Portions of the plant will dry within an hour while others will take longer. The bits that dry quick will crumble into dust by the time the

drying is complete. The initial investment for the dehydrator will pay off if you use it frequently to dry fruits, vegetables and meats as well. Your dehydrator can become one of your most valuable kitchen appliances.

Oven Drying



Although you can use an oven to dry herbs, it is very labour intensive and it will run up your electric bill. Most ovens do not have a low enough setting to simply put the herbs on a pan and leave them in the oven. Because herbs are best dried around 100 degrees and an oven typically doesn't go lower than 175, you will have to monitor the progress of the herbs carefully to ensure you don't dry them too quickly or burn them. One option is to leave the oven door open a few inches (yes, it will use up electricity), but it is about the only way you

can keep the temperature down. An oven thermometer is helpful and will help you get an idea of the internal temperature of the oven.

Solar Drying



While this method will dry the herbs quickly, it will also zap the flavour from the leaves. This is the least desirable method of drying herbs. The sun's strong rays will bleach the plants and you will lose the flavour, aroma and medicinal qualities of your plants. Drying herbs in the sun off of your porch or in a southern-facing window is an option if you are using the bunches for decorative purposes.

Microwave Drying



You can use your microwave to quickly dry herbs if you are in a rush. It is not an ideal method for some of the herbs that have high moisture content. It does require a little more work on your part and you can plan on spending a good 15 minutes standing in front of the microwave.

Refrigerator Drying



Yes, it sounds completely impossible, but it can be done. Mould growth will be inhibited in the refrigerator. The method is incredibly easy and doesn't require you to do much except put the herbs in the fridge for a couple of days and then take care of them when they are dry. This is an excellent option for chives and parsley, which tend to lose a lot of their flavour during the drying process.

Each of these methods has pros and cons. The key is finding one that works for you and your needs. Experiment a little until you find the one that works for you. In the next section, you will discover the different herbs and their moisture content, which will help you determine which method to use with each herb. Of course there is a learning curve, but it is minimal and there really isn't anything you can do that would ruin the herbs you harvest.

Chapter 4: The Most Common And Easiest Herbs To Dry

Tender Herbs: These are herbs that have high moisture content and are more prone to moulding. *Basil, oregano, chives, tarragon, lemon balm* and *mint* varieties.



*Basil is a good example of a
tender herb*

Less-Tender Herbs: These have low moisture content and can be dried via the hanging method without worrying about moulding. *Rosemary, sage, thyme, summer savoury, marjoram and parsley.*



*Rosemary is a good example
of a less-tender herb*

Herb Flowers: *Bee balm, chamomile, chive, dill, geranium, lavender, linden, marigold, nasturtium, rose, thyme and yarrow.*



*Chamomile is a good example
of a herb which is grown for
it's flowers*

Herb Leaves: *Bay, celery, chervil, dill, geranium, lemon balm, lemon verbena, lovage, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage, summer savoury, tarragon, parsley and thyme*



Parsley is a good example of a herb which is grown for its leaves

Herb Seeds: *Anise, caraway, celery, chervil, coriander, cumin, dill, fennel and mustard*



Anise is a good example of a herb grown for it's seeds

As you can see in some of the lists above, not all herbs are the green, leafy ones you would find in your market. There are plenty of “weeds” that are actually excellent flavour enhancers and are regularly used for their medicinal qualities. Marigold, fever few and even lavender are all excellent plants to dry and store.

Harvesting

Harvesting is an important part of the herb drying equation. You have to harvest at the right time to ensure you are getting the most flavour in your spices. For some herbs, you have the option of harvesting some of the leaves while letting the tops of the plant continue to

mature until seeds set. Dill and cilantro both produce seeds that are regularly used in the kitchen. The cilantro seed is referred to as coriander.

For other herbs, like chamomile and echinacea, you want to wait until the flower head opens and then harvest. You want to pluck the flowers within the first day or two of opening. This ensures you are getting the most potent flower heads possible. The sun and elements will slowly deteriorate the flower head, depleting the aromatic and medicinal qualities of the flower.

For leafy herbs, it is best to harvest the leaves just before the flower head opens. This ensures your leaves are filled with as much flavour and aroma as possible. When the flower opens, the plant will be putting its energy towards the flowering and ultimately seeding process and the leaves will start to wilt.

Ideally, gardeners will want to harvest the plant first thing in the morning after the dew has dried. Most aim to have the harvesting done by 10 in the morning. You want to catch the leaves, flowers and seeds before the sun has a chance to beat down on the plant and zap it of its energy and ultimately, flavour.

Do not harvest the plant unless you are ready to start the drying process right away. You don't want to harvest and then leave the plants sitting on the counter or in the refrigerator for a couple of days. You will lose flavour and risk the plant moulding. If you can, only harvest one variety at a time. If you only have a single day to take care of the drying, make sure you put the herbs in individual baskets to avoid getting them mixed up.

If you are harvesting plants from the wild or even your front yard, make sure the plants have not been exposed to herbicides, pesticides or animal urine and faeces. Do your best to pick plants that are in an enclosed area.

Chapter 5: How To Dry Herbs At Home With Minimal Fuss Or Expense

Drying herbs is truly one of the easiest preservation techniques you will come across. It requires very little time, effort or equipment. You don't have to watch them dry or carefully monitor the temperature or pressure like you would if you were canning.

Before you begin the drying process, you need to prepare your herbs. Pluck off any brown or black leaves. Any leaves that are wilted, yellowed or look poor in general should also be discarded. Inspect the plant for insects, just in case there were some brave enough to take on the aromatic herb plant. In most cases, you shouldn't need to rinse or wash the plants. If at all possible, avoid adding any extra water to the plant. You risk wilting the plant as well as adding drying time. If you must wash the plant, use cold running water and gently shake the plant to remove as much water as possible.

Indoor Hanging

Hanging the plants upside down indoors can be done a few different ways.

Option 1: This is best for moisture-rich herbs. Use a rubber band or string tied around the stems of the harvested plants. You want to create an herb bouquet. It best to bundle a single herb. Trying to save space by bundling a variety of herbs could cause problems. Also, do not bundle more than 8 to 10 plants in a single bundle. Too many plants will result in lack of air circulation and promote mould growth. Not all herbs will dry at the same rate. For herbs high in moisture, it is best to use a paper bag to help speed up the drying process. You want to make it go fairly fast to avoid mould growth. Cut a few holes in the paper bag to allow air circulation.

Place the herbs with the flower side pointing towards the bottom of the bag and the stems in the opening. Use a rubber band or string to tie the bag closed around the stems. Set the bag on the shelf of a pantry or in a corner of the kitchen. Anywhere the herbs are out of direct sunlight and not near sources of humidity is fine. The drying time of the herbs will vary. Check the status of the herbs after about 3 days and then every day following. The paper bag method is ideal because it will catch the seeds and bits of the plant that fall off during the drying process.

Option 2: Follow the same steps above, but do not use a paper bag. The bag speeds up the drying process, which isn't always necessary for the less-tender herbs. Use a coat hanger or curtain rod to hang the herb bundles. This method will produce a lovely aroma as the herbs dry. It is a good idea to put a plate or pan under the drying herb bundles to catch the bits that fall. If you are drying different types of herbs, use a separate plate for each bundle. Herbs are difficult to tell apart once they have dried. The kitchen is an ideal place because it is one of the warmer areas of the house.

Option 3: You can use an old, clean window screen to dry your herbs. If you don't have an old screen, you can buy screening material and stretch it out over a rack. You will need to turn the herbs once a day to ensure plenty of air circulation. The screen will prevent the majority of the dried bits from falling through, but it doesn't hurt to put a cookie sheet under the screen to catch any particles that do fall through. Leave plenty of space between the plants to allow better air circulation. Keep the screen out of direct sunlight. The plants you dry on the screen will curl. This isn't usually an issue. If you are using a screen, it is probably best to grind the herbs dried with this method.

Oven Drying

Turn your oven to the lowest setting possible. If your oven has a warm function, use it to dry your herbs. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper and place the leaves and stems on the sheet making sure to leave space in between the pieces. Place the tray on the lowest rack in the oven. Leave the door open to allow for air

circulation. Check the herbs every 15 to 20 minutes, turning occasionally. When the herbs are close to dry, turn off the oven, but leave the light on and let the herbs finish the drying process.

Another option is to leave the oven off with just the light on. This works best for bay leaves, sage or mint plants. Place the leaves on a paper towel. Put another paper towel on the top and add another layer of leaves. You can do this for up to five layers. Gently place the paper towel with the leaves on an oven rack and close the door. Leave it overnight. By morning, the leaves will have dried enough to store.

You can also use an old window screen placed on your woodstove during the winter to dry your herbs. Your house will be filled with the aroma from your drying herbs. The screen will need to be balanced on cast iron pots or cups to keep the herbs from being directly on the stove.

Dehydrator

A dehydrator is a quick and easy way to dry a lot of herbs at one time. If you have bought your dehydrator new, it will likely come with a booklet outlining the various settings and drying time for your herbs. Some dehydrators are fancier than others and will vary in the available controls. If your dehydrator comes with a temperature control, set the temp between 95 and 115 degrees. If you live in a place with high humidity, you will want to turn the heat up to 125 degrees. Place the herbs on the trays. It is best to keep one herb variety per tray to avoid getting them mixed up. Depending on your dehydrator, the process will take anywhere from one to four hours.

Refrigerator

Allow herbs to dry completely by letting them sit on the counter for an hour or so. Wet herbs placed in the fridge will mould! Lay the herbs on a plate or cookie sheet. Make sure there is space between each plant. Put the plate in the fridge, leaving it uncovered and let it sit for about a week. Herbs dried in the refrigerator tend to hold their

colour better than those dried with other methods. You can also put the herbs in a paper bag and allow them to dry. This method will take anywhere from one to two weeks.

Solar Drying

The sun is certainly an effective method to dry your herbs, but it is a bit too hot to be gentle. If you are going to use solar rays to dry your herbs, you will want to bundle them by the stems in the same fashion you would for indoor drying. Hang the herbs upside down from your porch or another railing that gets direct sunlight. It helps to wrap the herbs in cheesecloth to prevent birds from eating your produce. You can also use the paper bag from the indoor drying section. This method will typically take about three days.

Microwave

This method is not recommended for plants that have high moisture content, like mint. To dry in the microwave, remove the leaves from the stems and arrange on a paper towel. Place a paper towel over the leaves and place in microwave. Nuke on high for 1 minute. Let the herbs rest for 30 seconds before nuking for another 30 seconds. Alternate between 30 seconds on and 30 seconds off until herbs are dry. This can take up to 10 minutes.

Chapter 6: Herbs After You Have Dried Them

Your work is not complete once you have dried your herbs! Now it comes to the storage of the herbs. You may want to store your herbs in a variety of ways. Herbs are dry enough for storage when they crumble easily between your fingers. Don't crumble them all when you are testing dryness.

Ground



This is the most common form you will find in your kitchen. We buy ground spices at the market and shake them into our recipes. Grinding herbs is fairly simplistic. You can put the leaves and stems in a Ziploc bag and use a rolling pin to mash them up. The other option is a mortar and pestle. These are fairly inexpensive and can be found at your local pharmacy. Grind a few stems and leaves at a time to

make sure you are getting all the bits ground up. The storage time for ground spices ranges from 6 months to 2 years.

Whole Leaves



Leaves retain more flavour if they are not crushed for storage. If possible, store leaves whole and grind just before using. This ensures you are getting plenty of flavour. Whole leaves will store well for 2 to 5 years. Leafy herbs will only store for about 3 months to 2 years.

Seeds



Seeds should be stored as is. If you need ground seed for a recipe or tea, do not grind until just before use. Seeds will store well for 2 to 5 years. Seeds are often used in their whole form. You can also use your dried seeds to plant new herbs in your garden.

Flowers



During the drying process, the flowers will wither and lose some colour. Do not crush the flowers until you are ready to use them. The flowers will be very brittle. Do your best to handle them gently until you are ready to use them.

Storage Methods

- **Jars**-You can use mason jars sealed with a band and lid. This is a cheap way to store your dried herbs without investing in a bunch of fancy containers. Sterilize and thoroughly dry the jars before adding your dried spices.



- **Bags-** Ziploc Bags are an option. Spend the money on quality bags. If the bags do not seal completely, air will deteriorate your herbs. Bags are a good option for small quantities.



- **Plastic containers-** Plastic bowls or containers that have an airtight lid are also an option. However, you will want to find small bowls or containers. Opening and closing the container to grab a pinch of herbs will cause the herbs to lose their potency with the consistent exposure to air.



- **Old spice jars/containers**-Those spice jars you have sitting in your cupboard can be cleaned out and reused. They are perfect for your needs with the appropriate lids making it easy for you to shake out just enough.



Once you have put your herbs in a jar or bag, label it right away. It is too easy to forget what went where and you could end up mixing up your herbs. Date the container so you can follow proper rotation.

If you have a favourite blend, like Italian seasoning or a Mexican seasoning blend, prepare some blends and place in containers. This will save you some time when you are making your favourite dishes. You have probably experimented with spicing your foods and know just what you and your family like.

Do not store your dried herbs above the stove or a cupboard that is close to the stove or the dishwasher. The heat and humidity will shorten the shelf life. A cool, dark and dry location is your best option.

Monitor your dried herbs to make sure they do not have any moisture. Condensation inside the sealed jar is a sign the plants were not completely dry. If there is mould growing, you will need to toss the herbs. If there is no mould, you can go through the drying process again and salvage your plants.

It is important to remember that dried herbs are three to four times more potent than fresh herbs. If you are following a recipe that calls for fresh herbs and you are substituting dried herbs, keep this in mind.

For teas, use a teaspoon to tablespoon of the ground herb per cup. Pour hot water over the ground herbs and let steep five to ten minutes. You can use ground herbs or whole leaves. You can test the potency of your dried herbs by smelling them. If you can still detect the aroma of the plant, the dried herbs are fine to use. Even if you cannot smell the plant, it doesn't go bad. You can still use it but it may have very little aromatic or flavourful qualities.

Conclusion

As times keep getting tougher, it is important we find ways to cut costs in our monthly budget. While spices are probably not a huge line item in your budget, every dollar counts. If you cook at home a lot (which you should be doing if you really want to save money) you are going to become very familiar with spices. Spices can make or break a meal. It is fun to experiment, especially when you are using plants from your own garden.

Because herbs are so prolific, you could actually make some money with your dried herbs. People love herbs that have been dried by hand and will be thrilled to buy them from you. You won't only be saving yourself some money, but actually make a few bucks as well!

There is almost no investment needed to dry your own herbs. If you don't already have a garden, consider blocking out a section to start growing your own herbs. You can plant herbs between rows in your garden to help repel pests. Keep in mind; herbs tend to be very prolific and some are considered weeds because they do spread rapidly.

If a garden isn't an option, buy a few cheap planters and grow your herbs in a window sill. It is simply too easy not to grow your own herbs. There is no time like the present to get started! You will love the smell the drying herbs release into your home. Visitors to your home will leave hungry and craving food!

Herb satchels or decorated jars of herbs make lovely gifts. Your friends, family and co-workers will all appreciate the effort you put in to drying the herbs.

From The Author

Thank you for taking the time to read this book. As an author, I understand the importance of creating books which my readers will find both enjoyable and informative. If you have the time and feel generous, please don't hesitate to leave an honest review of this book.

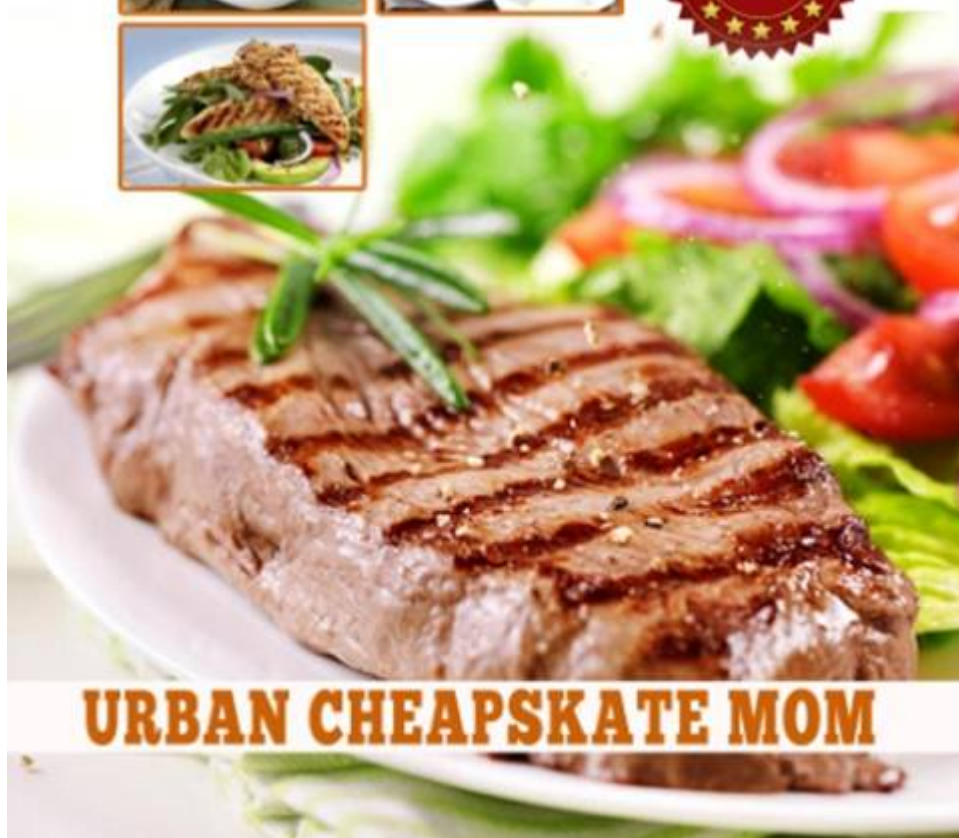
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