
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 90 Maximizing Herbal Flavors

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/90

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, Episode Number 90.

Announcer: Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert, Theresa Loe.

Theresa: Hey there, everybody. Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe, and this podcast is about living farm fresh without the farm. We talk about things like preserving the harvest, small space food growing, and other simple ways that you can live a more sustainable lifestyle. As always, you can dive deep into any of these topics or learn about my online canning academy or any of the other things that I have cooking up by just visiting my website, livinghomegrown.com.

Now, speaking of things that I have cooking up, I want to very much encourage you to join something on my website. Either sign up for one of the free PDF downloads, sign up for one of the resources, some way that you enter your e-mail address on my website. The reason is that, over the next couple of months, actually the next month and a half, I have several different events that are going to be happening, all of them free, and I want to make sure that you are in the loop so that you know what's coming down the pike. That's all I'm going to say about it right now.

But definitely you want to be on my e-mail list so that you know everything that's happening over the next few months before we get really into the full-blown summer with everything being harvested and everything that we might be canning up or preserving. We have a lot happening over actually the next four to six months with Living Homegrown, but I definitely want to make sure that you're on my e-mail list. I know a lot of you listen while you're driving or you're working out. Just make sure you get over to livinghomegrown.com and sign up for something. It doesn't matter what it is. Just so that you're on my e-mail list. Super duper important.

Also, I want to let you know that I need to thank you, because the living homegrown podcast just won the People's Choice Award for the Broadcast Award with Taste. I really have you guys to thank for that. I'm hoping that that

will help bring new people to listen to the podcast. I put a lot of work into this podcast because I try to make it top quality and I want to reach as many people as I can. It's completely free to you. What would really help there is if you could share the podcast with someone that you know. If there's anyone that you know that might be interested in growing their own food, raising backyard chickens, or learning how to preserve in some way or cook with organic food, make sure you let them know about this podcast. It's super easy. If everybody just let one person know, we would really broaden our audience. That would just thrill me to pieces, because this is just a labor of love that I do. I want to reach as many people as possible. Thanks for that.

Today's podcast is about learning really simple ways that you can add more punch to your everyday food using herbs. I've talked about herbs a lot on this show before, because, as you may know if you've been listening to me for any amount of time, herbs were my gateway drug into the whole world of growing food. That's because I started growing herbs before I really started diving fully into growing fruits and vegetables. That's because when I was in school and I was studying to be an engineer, by the time I got my engineering degree I really realized that my passion was in growing and cooking with food. I worked as an engineer by day and I went back to school at night and I studied sustainable horticulture and I went back to cooking school so that I could really know how to use the things that I was growing.

Today I want to share with you two really simple ways that you can preserve herbs and use them to get really a fresh flavor. I truly believe that fresh herbs can take ordinary recipes to a very professional level. But the truth is, we don't always have fresh herbs at our fingertips. That's why I have all these different ways that I preserve my herbs so that I can still get the fresh flavor. In the show notes for today's episode, I will link to some of the other episodes where I've covered herbs and different ways that you can preserve them and use them in really fresh ways. I'll also have a free PDF download for you with the recipes that I'm going to talk about today.

If you listen to this episode and you think, "Oh man. I really want to have that recipe at my fingertips," then you want to go to the show notes for today's episode and you can download it and print it out so that you have it whenever you want to dive into any of these recipes. To get to the show notes, just go to livinghomegrown.com/90 and everything will be there. When you do download something from my website, you are put onto my e-mail list. This is a great way for you to get on the e-mail list so you don't miss anything. Great.

First up, what I want to talk about today is herb salt. I've covered salts before in other episodes where I talked about fermenting with salt. I believe I did an episode on wine salt. I don't remember the number, but I will have that in the show notes, I will link to it, on how to make wine salt. Wine salt is where you cook down the wine and then you combine that wine syrup with salt and herbs.

It's a really fun project and you get a lot of flavor that way. I typically use a wine salt as more like a finishing salt, meaning that I add it at the very end of cooking. You can get kind of a wine reduction sauce flavor along with the salt flavor. It's where you would use it where a classic recipe would say "season to taste" at the end. That's where you would use something like wine salt. I'm doing "season to taste" in air quotes, but you can't see that.

That's what wine salt is. But today I'm going to talk about standard herb salt. It's a lot easier to make than wine salt. It also can be used as a finishing salt, but I typically use herb salt at the beginning or in the middle of my cooking process so that the herbs are imparting their flavor throughout the cooking process. Basically, herb salt is just a sea salt or a kosher salt that is combined with chopped fresh herbs. They're chopped together and then they're allowed to dry, and then you store it in a jar. You use it with the herbs being in a dried state. The salt absorbs or draws out all the moisture from the herbs and also the flavor. It's really incredibly easy to make and has a lot of punch. When you go to use it, it's like ... Oh my gosh. It's like the salt is infused with the herbal oils and flavors. What's nice about that is that a little bit can go a long way. It's also a form of food preservation, because salt is a preservative. The salt will preserve the herbs.

I want to talk to you real quick first about which salt you would use for this recipe. I mentioned you would use either sea salt or kosher salt. You may be wondering, "Well, why would I do that instead of just using regular old table salt?" Let me explain. First of all, just know that the basic chemical makeup of all salt is roughly the same. It's all sodium chloride. The difference between the different salts when you look at them is basically threefold. It's how it's processed. It's if their minerals are stripped out or if anything is added to the salt, like an anti-caking agent or iodine, which is the case for table salt. The third part is texture. When you are looking at salt from a nutritional standpoint, you might be more interested in how it was processed or you might be more interested in making sure that none of the minerals were stripped out or that there is nothing extra added in.

But if you're looking at this from a chef's standpoint, they are usually going to look at it from a textural standpoint first, because table salt is very fine and a sea salt or a kosher salt has more uneven granules. It's not as uniform and the granules tend to be a little bit larger, so it's easier to take a pinch of that type of salt and sprinkle it from up above the food and get a very even coating of salt on your food. I know you've all seen this. When a chef is cooking, they will pinch the salt and drop it from about a foot above the food and they're rubbing it between their fingers as they go back and forth. That is very strategic because that way you get a very even coating of the salt on whatever it is you are seasoning. From a textural standpoint, it's very important.

Also, a chef looks at the flavor. There are different flavor components when a

salt is either processed a lot or processed very little. Sea salt tends to have better flavor components because it has all of the minerals still in there. Not to make this too complicated, but I always get that question from people, is, "Why would I choose sea salt or kosher salt over table salt?" It's all three of those reasons. Table salt is the most processed. It does not have the minerals. It has anti-caking agents and iodine added to it, which doesn't usually matter too much in what we're making today. But it also has the textural component, in that the granules are very uniform and very small. It is a little bit harder to do your seasoning that way. I hope that explains it.

For me, the main reason that I like to use sea salt is because of the minerals. I figure, if I'm going to be using the salt, I like to have the little extra goodness in there of the minerals that are in the sea salt. Kosher salt is a little bit easier to find. It's a little bit less expensive, has a larger grain. So, it is another option if you want to go that way. You can use either one. Both will be great for dehydration of the herbs and for seasoning your food.

How do you make herb salt? It's super simple. I'm going to give you a little recipe here. The main thing is that there are no set amounts. You can adjust this and make it more herby or less herby however you want. The general idea is to have about this ratio and it works pretty well in drying out the herbs and getting enough flavor. What I do is I take about a half a cup of course sea salt or kosher salt and I add to that two cups of loosely-packed herbs. I'm going to talk to you about which herbs in a minute. It's two cups loosely-packed. What that means is that you're not filling up a two-cup measure cup and then packing it down and filling it and packing it down. That would be hard-packed or hand-packed herbs. These are loosely-packed. You would take the herb leaves, you would put them into the container and press them down a little bit and measure until you have about two cups. You can see it's not an exact science at all.

I also, to my herb salt, I add in extras like citrus peel. That is probably my one go-to thing that I will nine times out of 10 add to my herb salt. The citrus peel also gets dried out and dehydrated and then adds flavor as well to the salt. It's really nice to add citrus peel as well, but it's completely optional.

Let me talk for a second about which herbs to use, and then I'll tell you how to put the whole thing together. When it comes to herbs, I mostly use the savory herbs. That's very standard, typical for doing an herb salt. The herbs that I like to use are things like rosemary, sage, thyme, oregano, marjoram, savory, sometimes I'll throw in some mint, sometimes I'll do cilantro. There are other herbs that you can use.

A lot of people typically will use parsley or basil. I do not usually use those in my herb salt. I preserve those in other ways. I will link in the show notes to other ways to preserve those type of herbs. The reason is that both parsley and basil have very volatile oils. If you've ever opened up a dried jar or parsley and

smelled it, you probably couldn't smell anything. If you chop fresh parsley, it definitely has a flavor and an aroma that is very strong that does not withstand the test of time once it's dried. Basil is the same way. Dried basil pretty much has lost most of its volatile oils and a lot of its flavor. I don't typically use parsley or basil in my herb salt.

Although I will say one thing about that, and that is that if you have a ton of basil and you just want to do all basil, two cups of basil with the salt, you will preserve some of that basil volatile oils in the salt. It's not completely flavorless like it is in the dried state. But I find there's other ways that I like to preserve basil much better, one of them being herb concentrates, which I will link to in the show notes if you're interested in doing that. It just packs so much more flavor in a much better way than using it in salt. If you have a ton of basil and you want to give it a shot, you do get some flavor, just not all of the flavor, if that makes sense.

You can combine whatever herbs you want in that two cups. If you typically do Italian cooking, maybe you would want to have rosemary, oregano, and marjoram in there. Or, if you just really, really love rosemary, like I do, then you'll probably just want to make straight rosemary salt with nothing else in there. You can absolutely create whatever your favorite herbs are. I just want to make sure you know, this can be completely custom to whatever you like to use in your cooking.

One more thing. Another herb that you can use in salt is dill weed, which dill weed are the leaves of the dill. You can use dill weed. It's okay. You get some flavor that way. If you really want to make a dill salt, then I recommend doing this with the dill seed, because that has a lot more flavor.

There's two ways that you make the salt. You can either do it in a food processor or you can do it by hand. I do both ways. They both work great. I probably do it by hand more than any other way, just because I don't want to have to clean the food processor. It works either way. If you're going to use a food processor, you would put the salt and the herbs into the food processor and pulse it until the herbs are finely chopped. You don't want to pulse it until you have a paste. You want to keep it a little bit chunky. If you do it by hand, same thing. You would first chop the herbs. Then you would pour the salt over the herbs, and then chop some more so that it gets incorporated.

One thing I forgot to mention is about the citrus peel. When you are chopping up your herbs and salt, either in the food processor or by hand, you can take just a potato peeler and peel off a little bit of a lemon or a lime or an orange and toss that in to be chopped with the herbs and the salt. When you do that, the chopping will release the oils of the citrus of that peel and infuse the salt. It's so easy. Then the salt will dehydrate the citrus peel along with the herbs so you still retain that flavor, because when you drop this into food or soup or stew it

gets reconstituted and releases even more flavor. Having citrus peel in there is really a great thing, so I'd add that in too.

Whichever method you use, the next step is to line a cookie sheet with a piece of parchment paper and spread the salt out to dry for 24 to 48 hours. The reason I say to line the cookie sheet is because salt can be very abrasive to whatever your cookie sheet is, and you can damage your cookie sheet if you leave the salt just sitting there, depending upon what the material is. I always just line my cookie sheet with a piece of parchment paper and I lay the salt out in a thin layer and just let it sit on my counter.

I live in Los Angeles, so it's very dry here, and this works usually in 24 hours. However, if you live where it's very humid or if you're doing this at a time of year when it is very humid, then you might want to instead put it inside a very low oven for an hour or two and then take it out and let it cool. You can do it either way. The thing you don't want to do is put it into the oven and forget about it and burn the herbs that are in the salt. Put it on the lowest setting that your oven can go, just so it's dry in there and warm, and put the cookie sheet in, set a timer, then let it completely cool on your countertop.

Then you're going to take the salt and put it into an airtight container, put on the lid. You can store it in the pantry, or, if you're at all worried about it losing some of its flavor qualities, you could store it in the refrigerator. Having the airtight container will prevent it from gumming up or getting chunky inside that container. The salt preserves it, so it's perfectly safe, and you can just leave it on your countertop or in your pantry, wherever you leave your spices. Then, whenever you want to use it, it's really simple. You just open it up and use it as you would use any other salt. The way I use it is in my soups and stews and roasts and sauces and any savory dish that calls for salt, I will reach for an herb salt if at all possible. It's especially good in really slow-cooked dishes, something in the Crock Pot or something that I'm roasting very slowly in the oven, like maybe some root vegetables. I will use the herb blend whenever I can.

The thing to keep in mind, though, is that this is a salt. You use it as much as you would use regular salt. A little bit goes a long way. You don't want to go all nuts and oversalt your food, because you can always add more but you can't take away. As I said before, I like to use it at the beginning or the middle of my cooking stage so that the herb flavors have a chance to really permeate the food, not just at the end where you don't really get a chance for it to all meld together. Does that make sense?

That's how you do herb salt. Super simple. Super easy. I usually make this when I go to the farmers markets and they are starting to harvest large quantities of herbs and they start to have bundles out in the spring or summer. I will just grab a whole bunch, a whole bundle or bunch, of the herbs, and I can make it that way. I also have a full herb garden in my backyard. Whenever I have to cut back

anything or trim back one of my herb plants, then I also make herb salt. You can definitely bump this up, double the recipe or half the recipe, and it works great. You just always want to make sure that you have enough salt to dehydrate the herbs. That way, they will really hold their flavor and their color well. It works great in all those different dishes. I think you'll really like that one.

The next recipe is herb butter. I've mentioned herb butter before on the podcast. It's a great way to use herbs through the wintertime. I make a lot of herb butters in the fall. However, I think it's just a great thing to have on hand all the time. The way I use my butter is I will make the herbal butter and I will store it in the freezer. It is one of those ways that you can get a fresh herb flavor when you don't have fresh herbs. I wanted to mention it here because it is also a really great flavor enhancer that is natural and can be something that you have at your fingertips all the time.

As you can imagine, herb butters are typically used on things like bread. You can use them just to spread on your bread at dinner, or you can use them on your pasta. You can throw them into your sauce if you're making a quick pasta sauce. You can add them to your vegetables as you're about to serve them. But they also work great when you're adding them to sauces and marinades and basting mixtures. Anything that you would use butter for that is a savory recipe, you can have an herb butter on hand and it just adds another layer of flavor and they get to be stored in the freezer and they last for months.

The basic herb butter recipe I'm going to go over here is really, really flexible. You just adjust the herb or the amount of butter that you have on hand. I don't want you to feel like, "Oh man. I have to have that exact amount of herb or that exact amount of butter." You don't want to be constrained in any way. There's no exact proportions. It's really just a matter of mixing in the chopped herbs into the butter and it's as simple as that. Don't you love that? It's just super easy. Also, I want to mention that you can add a lot of other things besides herbs to a butter. You can add chopped shallots or scallions or dried red pepper flakes or, again, you can add citrus peel to any combination. You can get really creative with the butters.

The basic herb butter recipe is one stick of real organic butter. I don't use margarine. You want to use the real thing. This is real food. Then you're going to just add approximately two tablespoons of chopped fresh herbs. It doesn't work as well with dried herbs. I definitely recommend that you use fresh herbs for this. Those two tablespoons can be all one herb or you could mix one, two, or three different herbs into those two tablespoons of fresh herbs. You can also add any other seasonings or spices that you want to. You could chop in some garlic. You could add citrus peel that is finely grated, a teaspoon or so into the butter would be great. You could make it as lemony as you want by adding more of the citrus peel. It could be orange, lemon, lime, whatever you want.

Basically, all you do is you let the butter soften so it's at room temperature and you blend in whatever herbs and spices or citrus peel you want. Once it's well blended, what I do is I roll it into a log onto plastic wrap or parchment paper. If you don't want to use plastic wrap, a lot of people don't want to have their food in contact with plastic and I totally get that. It's easier with plastic, but I use parchment all the time. I will lay this out on parchment paper down long skinny log of butter. Then I will roll up the parchment paper or the plastic wrap and I will tie it with rubber bands and I will place that inside a baggie or container, just so that it's easy to keep inside my freezer.

You also want to be sure to label and date this butter, because I can guarantee you months from now you will pull it out and you will not remember exactly what you put in there. Absolutely label it. I try to use my butters within four months, just for best flavor. After that, it can start to get some of the flavors of the freezer. Within four months is usually your best bet and you have the most potent flavors of the herbs.

The way you use it is that you just pull out this little log of butter, you unroll it, and you chop off a medallion size of the butter. You can toss it into a sauce or you can leave it out and let it get softened and use it to make garlic bread or herbal bread. Spread it on anything that you want. Add it to your vegetables. There's a million and one things that you can do with the butter.

A basic recipe, let me just give you an example so you kind of can imagine this in your mind, is a rosemary garlic butter. You would have one stick of real butter that's softened, two tablespoons of chopped rosemary, and one full clove on minced garlic. One hint here. When you are mincing the garlic, if you want to, you could take a little bit of sea salt or kosher salt and sprinkle it onto that garlic as you're mincing it, and it will make it turn into a finer paste which works great for blending it into the butter. That's another little hint.

Or you could make a lemon herb butter, which is fantastic on vegetables. That would just be one stick of butter with two tablespoons of freshly chopped thyme and two teaspoons of grated lemon zest. You would blend that all together and put it into the freezer and you would have something fantastic at your fingertips for fish, chicken, vegetables, all sorts of things. I can't stress enough how easy this is and how just taking a few minutes to create either a butter or a herb salt will really enhance your cooking. Just having one or two choices in your freezer or in your pantry can take a totally bland recipe to a whole nother level.

That's it for this week. Now remember that all of these recipes are on the website in the show notes for this episode. Just go to livinghomegrown.com/90. I will also have links to the other herbal episodes for you. Until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.



Live farm fresh without the farm®

Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown Podcast. Visit livinghomegrown.com to download Theresa's free canning resource guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the Living Homegrown Podcast.