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The closing of the garden and the conservation of herbs

We hope you enjoyed this year's herb garden. There will be improvements next year but we have done our best in this time of pandemic. We had difficulty sourcing supplies: many varieties were not available and mature plants were scarce. We are closing the garden, but the big clean-up will take place in the spring. We are applying the permaculture practices popularized by Larry Hodgson "*The Lazy Gardener*". This method involves leaving perennials and annuals in place. The dead leaves will enrich the soil and the branches will hold the snow and avoid uprooting the perennials in case of frost and thaw. We have added some mulch to protect more fragile plants such as sage. The pots have been emptied and stored and will be used again next year.

We already have ideas for improvements for next year. More seedlings, more mature plants and a longer delay before the first harvest will allow the garden to be lush. Some herbs that are too abundant and not picked much will be partially removed. If you have any suggestions on the herbs you would like in the garden, please do not hesitate to make them to us. Anyone who would like to get involved is welcome. This spring, due to the barrier measures, we did not ask for help to avoid contamination.

Conservation of herbs

The gardening season is over but herbs are increasingly available throughout the winter in supermarkets as cut herbs or potted plants. It is often difficult to keep them until it is time to eat them. Here are some methods to store your herbs.



In the refrigerator

Cut herbs can be stored in the refrigerator, in a *Tupperware*-type plastic dish on a paper towel or cloth. The cloth absorbs moisture and the herbs will keep for more than a week. You can buy jars specially designed to keep herbs in the fridge. They are beautiful but use a lot of space. They often spend more time in the cupboard than in the fridge.

Drying

You can also dry herbs in small bunches, upside down, in a well-ventilated, dry and dark place. You can also hang them in paper bags pierced with small holes. They will protect the herbs from the light. Once well dried, store the herbs in a glass jar in a cupboard away from the light.



The herbs best suited for drying are: oregano, marjoram, thyme, laurel and verbena. Other plants such as basil, chervil, chives, parsley and pineapple sage tend to lose their flavour or turn brown when dried. Dehydrators machines are available for sale; they are quite efficient but somewhat expensive. Drying in the oven or microwave is also possible but more difficult.

Freezing

For plants that are difficult to dry, freezing can be a good option. Chop up the herbs and place in ice cube trays. Cover with water or oil. Put the well frozen herb ice cubes in freezer bags. Plants suitable for freezing include parsley, coriander, lovage and basil.



Growing herbs indoors

Many herbs can be grown indoors all winter long. Since herbs require an average of 12 hours of sunlight per day, you will need specially designed lamps.

Herbal butters

Herbal butters are also an excellent and delicious way to preserve herbs. Simply grind herbs of your choice and mix them with soft butter. Rolls are then shaped and wrapped in waxed paper and frozen. You can also cut the roll into slices when it has hardened and store these slices in containers in the freezer for easy use. Mint, dill, thyme or marjoram butters combined with garlic or French shallot will be delicious on bread, steamed vegetables or fish.



Herbal oils



Let 30 ml of herbs wilt slightly and then add them to a cup of oil. Leave to macerate for two or three weeks and stir the bottle regularly. You can add 30ml of vinegar per 250 ml of oil to prevent the oil from being degraded by the water contained in the herbs. Open the bottle occasionally to allow condensation to escape. Then filter the oil by pressing well. Put the oil back in the bottle. You can add a branch of the same herb that was used to flavour your oil for decoration. My favourite oils are thyme, tarragon and dill oils. Rosemary also gives a rich flavour to olive oil.

Herbal vinegars

The process is similar to herbal oils: put 125 ml of the crushed herbs in 500 ml of vinegar and close the container tightly. Place in a dark place and stir occasionally. The vinegar should be ready after about 10 days. Filter and then add a small branch of fresh herb for decoration. You can use red or white wine vinegar, cider vinegar or rice vinegar. The purple basil vinegar has a beautiful color.



Flavoured honeys

Seeds and herbs can bring additional aromas and medicinal properties to honey. Anise seeds, coriander, fennel, lavender, lemon verbena, marjoram, mint, rosemary, sage, and thyme are good options. Use 15 ml of fresh herbs or 2.5 ml of seeds for every 500 ml of honey. Place the chosen herbs or seeds in a small piece of cheesecloth. Insert this small bag in the honey and let it macerate for at least a week, then remove the small bag and voilà, a wonderful flavoured honey!



*We hope that these suggestions will help you enjoy herbs all winter long.
They make great gifts for your family and friends during the holidays.*



We wish you a great winter and look forward to receiving your suggestions for next spring!

References : Herbes et épices médicinales au menu, de Danièle Laberge et Natacha Imbeault

Confessions d'un jardinier paresseux: «Je ne travaille pas fort à l'automne!» de Larry Hodgson <https://jardinierparesseux.com/articles/>

