



Great Ways to Use Herbs

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Winter is a great time to experiment with herbs. You have more time than gardening season and it will help chase away those winter blues. Drying herbs is easy and will provide you plenty of materials to experiment with later in the season. But many people stop there, not knowing what to do with them or are afraid of the result. I assure you that many of us go through that initial dilemma. I have some simple but proven ideas that will jump-start you on your way to learning to use your herb harvest.

Some people would like to use more herbs in their cooking, but don't know how much or what foods to use with a certain herb. Start with using thyme. You can use thyme with everything and it is hard to add too much of it. Once you learn how much of an herb suits your taste, start experimenting with a few more common herbs. An unused coffee grinder is a great way to finely grind dried or even fresh herbs for cooking.

Tea is a delicious way to use your herbs. Two teas that even the non-herbal tea enthusiast might enjoy are peppermint and ginger. I know, many people do not grow their own ginger; but it is too good to leave out. To make herbal tea, pour boiling water over 1 tablespoon fresh herbs per cup or 1/2 tablespoon dried. For ginger use an inch of the sliced peel "root". Adjust volume of herbs according to taste. Steep for 10 minutes in teapot or with saucer over cup. Sweeten if needed. Do NOT be surprised if it tastes superior to any tea that you buy in a store.

A tea made of sage or rosemary can be used as a rinse that can clean residual shampoo or conditioners from your hair, leaving hair soft and shiny. They both can darken hair gradually if used regularly once or twice a week. Pour 2 cups of boiling water over 1 tablespoon fresh or 1/2 tablespoon dried rosemary leaves and steep until cool. For sage use 1/4 cup of dried or fresh leaves. Once the tea has cooled stain out the herbs. To use pour over clean hair. Do not rinse.

Ginger is great to add to bathwater for those chilly days when you can't seem to make the bath water hot enough. Just add twice the amount of gingerroot to the bath water as what you use to make tea. Carefully adjust the amount of ginger to your preference. Too much ginger will feel unpleasant to sensitive body parts. Your bath will feel incredibly warm – perfect for a cold day.

A wonderful way to deodorize carpets from pet smell is to mix 2 parts of baking soda to one part dried lavender flowers or leaves. Sprinkle onto the carpet as you would use a carpet deodorizer. Wait about 15 minutes and vacuum. Not only will your carpet be refreshed but the ingredients will not harm your dog or cat. And it smells great when you vacuum it up. For a quick but potent potpourri, boil a pot of water, add a small handful of lavender leaves or buds, and reduce to a slow simmer. (Peppermint also works great for this purpose.) Save the dried stems from the lavender for adding to your woodstove or fireplace for a fragrant way to start your fire.

Warning! Once you start using herbs it's hard to stop.

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