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Ask Aunt Daisy

More About Herbs and Spices

I THINK we can well spare a second page for this very fascinating subject, especially as the salad season is here, and the common herbs are so valuable for giving a magic touch to these.

Marjoram Uses

Either fresh or dried, marjoram is an important ingredient of the "bouquet garni"—a sprig or two each of thyme, parsley, rosemary, bay leaf and marjoram tied together and added to soup or stew at start of cooking, and removed before serving. Marjoram is good in a sauce for fish; and also should be added to that accompaniment for egg-dishes, steak or chicken dishes called "fines herbes," namely, equal amounts of minced chives, parsley and thyme. You may use it sparingly in stuffings, or minced in green salads, or with cooked vegetables, including asparagus, carrots and tomatoes. It has been called "simply scrumptious" in scrambled eggs; and with mushrooms.

Chives

"The tender green tops of this delicate yet snappy onion should always be clipped with scissors, very fine, for sprinkling over sandwiches, chops, hamburgers, tomatoes, cucumbers, sausages, tomato cocktails. French dressing, salads, mashed potatoes, on lettuce salad, omelettes, croquettes, thousand island, or in tartar sauce with fish. The breezy springlike flavour of chives makes the most of almost any spread of soft cheese, such as cream or cottage, by simply mixing it in. Cook string beans with chives and half as much parsley, removed before serving. Try clipped chives on buttered new potatoes in place of parsley, and to give colour to light soups such as celery and potato. Since the flavour is quickly lost after cutting, it is handled by green-grocers in pots, which are handy to keep on the window sill, if you haven't a patch in the garden, all through the winter" (extract from American book).

Turmeric

This is the aromatic root of a plant belonging to the ginger family. It is really a native of Indonesia and China, but is now exported from Haiti and Jamaica, and even from Canada. The roots grow about the same size as ginger, but the flavour of turmeric is quite unlike that of ginger, having a clean, fresh odour, and a distinctive, aromatic flavour. It is generally bought ground, but sometimes whole. It is an essential ingredient of curry powder; and lends flavour and colour to the popular prepared mustard. Most pickle and relish recipes owe their success to this spice.

Oregano

This is not dissimilar in flavour to marjoram, but is stronger, with an aromatic and pleasantly bitter undertone. Actually the word "oregano" is Spanish for marjoram! It is used in seasoning soups, fish, salads and egg-dishes; and is an essential ingredient of chili powder, which is used so much in the Chili con Carne, and many other American dishes, besides oyster-cocktails, sauces, hamburgers, frankfurters and as a gravy or stew seasoning. If you cannot buy chili powder when making Chili con Carne (from your American recipes or from my Californian one given below) you can mix up a powder of

your own with marjoram, parsley, a little mint and oregano (if you can get it).

Sage

This is considered in America to be the most popular of herbs. It is indispensable in the stuffing for the Thanksgiving turkey and the New Year's goose, as well as being "comfortable" in roast duck and savoury sausages. There is a sage-flavoured cheese, too, in Vermont; and it is said that if a leg of lamb (or any other cut) is wrapped in a large quantity of fresh sage leaves and allowed to absorb their full fragrance for 2 days before roasting, the flavour is delicious. Sage is sold in powdered form, and you may try it in salad dressings, for a change, and when stuffing baked fish; and to flavour cottage cheese.

Thyme

Thyme belongs to the mint family, and it sold in powdered form. You use sprigs of fresh thyme in flavouring stews, and powdered in seasonings, especially with pork. One American idea is to make hollows in the middle of big, baked potatoes which have been split in halves, their contents mashed with butter and cream, and then put back into the skins. Fill these hollows (piled up) with hashed baked pork and sprinkle a little powdered thyme over!

Cloves

Although cloves have such a lengthy history—being mentioned in Chinese books of the 3rd Century, B.C.—it has only recently been established that they are a great help in digestion, stimulating the flow of digestive juices, and being non-injurious to the lining of the stomach. They are the dried, unopened buds of an evergreen tree which grows to over thirty feet in height, but is nevertheless a fragile tree and the picking of the unopened flower-buds has to be done very carefully. The trees begin bearing in their seventh year, and often continue for 100 years! The buds are spread on mats to dry for 6 to 8 days; and are called "cloves" from the French word "clou," a little nail, which they resemble. They originally grew chiefly on the Molucca Islands, and were accounted so valuable that wars were fought between natives and Europeans for the rights to this profitable business. We use them whole in studding ham, in pickling peaches and such fruits, and in sweet syrups and apple pies; while when ground they give a spicy flavour to cakes and puddings. According to ancient Chinese records, the court-officers had to hold cloves in their mouths when addressing the sovereign!

Angelica

I looked up the information about this during the war years, in response to a request from someone who grew angelica and wanted to "candy" it, as the bought angelica was then unavailable. This is done in the same way as candying other fruits, or even violets or rose-leaves—being scalded, then cooled, and then boiled in thick sugar syrup for 3 or 4 days running, being left to cool at night. It becomes a tender and pretty green product, softened by fermentation while mellowing in the syrup.

Uses: Slice it thin, or in small dice, or slivers, and use in fruit cakes, and as a gay decoration in icings; also in sweet



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