



KING HENRY'S WALK garden

PRESERVING THE TASTE OF SUMMER



Speciality vinegars

Most can be made within a week. As vinegar has a high acidity level there is no danger of it going off. Use good quality vinegar, whether it be cider, wine or rice vinegar. Malt vinegars are strong tasting but good for highly flavoured pickles, e.g. onions. Only use stainless steel or enamel saucepans to heat vinegar as cast iron or aluminium pans will cause a metallurgic reaction. Crush or bruise the herbs to get the maximum flavour. Flavoured vinegars are lovely for salad dressings and can be used to marinate and tenderize meat.

FRUIT VINEGAR

2 cups of hulled strawberries

or

1 cup raspberries, cherries or blueberries

Half a cup rice vinegar

2 tsp granulated sugar

Put fruit in a jar.

Heat vinegar to almost boiling. Pour over to cover the fruit. Put a lid on the jar and steep for several days at room temperature out of sunlight.

Strain through a fine sieve. Discard the pulp. Heat again with the sugar until it dissolves. Pour into a clean jar and store in the fridge.

HERBAL VINEGARS

2 cups of vinegar (500 ml) – white wine, red wine, rice or cider vinegar.

Half a cup (125 ml) of herbs, e.g. tarragon, rosemary, sage, thyme, basil, parley, chives, mint, dill or oregano.

Crush or bruise the herbs. Heat the vinegar but don't let it boil. Pour over. Leave to steep for a week or so. Strain from time to time and add more herbs until you get the desired strength of flavour. Then bottle and drop in a whole fresh sprig of your chosen herb for decoration.

Flavoured oils

Herbal oils, usually infusions of chilli, garlic or herbs, pack a lot of flavour into every drop. They are delicious as a dip for good bread. Flavoured oils need to be heated at a low oven temperature to drive off the water in the food. Heating them also helps to release the flavours. Once strained and bottled they must be kept in the fridge for no longer than one month.

BASIL OIL WITH LEMON AND BLACK PEPPERCORNS

1 cup olive oil
6 leaves fresh basil
2 strips of lemon rind
8 black peppercorns

Combine all the ingredients and bake at 150° C (300° F) for 90 minutes or until the basil is blackened. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool.

Line a strainer with a coffee filter (or cheesecloth) and strain the oil into a glass jar. Keep in the fridge and use it up within the month.

Variations

Thyme, lemon and black peppercorns. Instead of basil, use four sprigs of thyme.

Chilli basil oil. Omit peppercorns and lemon and substitute with one chopped up chilli pepper.

Garlic basil oil. Instead of lemon rind and peppercorns infuse the oil with three cloves of garlic cut in half.

Herbal teas

Good basic teas are peppermint (good for digestion), lemon verbena and nettle. These are all delicious made with freshly picked leaves. For calming chamomile tea use the flowers, fresh or dried, not the leaves. Pick the chamomile flowers for drying when the petals are at their peak. Use only fresh flowers, as older flowers lose most of their beneficial oils. Remove the leaves and dry on screens in the shade. Store in airtight containers until needed. Only use the top four leaves of nettles for tea from young plants that are not in flower.

The best time for picking herbs or flowers is in the morning before the sun starts to draw out the essential oils.

Pour boiling water over fresh or dried leaves or flowers and allow to steep for five minutes or more.

Freezing herbs

Basil, coriander, chives, mint, parsley and tarragon are better frozen rather than dried. Either put whole sprigs into labelled plastic bags and freeze (they will crumble easily between finger and thumb once frozen), or pack them into ice cubes with a couple of teaspoons of water. Once frozen into ice cubes they can be transferred into bags.

Sun-dried tomatoes

We don't have the climate to sun dry. It takes two weeks of Italian sunshine to get good sun dried tomatoes (truly a taste sensation in salads) but you can get a very good result using the oven.

Choose tomatoes that are ripe but still firm. The classic tomato for sun drying is 'Roma'. It has few pips and lots of flesh and is also the tomato widely used for tomato paste. However any

tomatoes will do. Keep in mind that when dried, the tomatoes will have shrunk by more than half. 5lbs or 2 kilos of fresh tomatoes will fill approximately two cups when dried.

Set the oven at the lowest level, 50° C or 120° F. Wash the tomatoes. If they are small cherry ones cut them in half, if they are beef tomatoes slice them thickly. You can give them a sprinkling of salt and dried herbs – typically basil or oregano – either at this stage or later. Put the halved/sliced tomatoes on wire racks with space between for air circulation. If you don't have wire racks, baking trays covered with baking sheets are fine but remember to turn the tomatoes occasionally. Leave them for between 12 and 18 hours. It is impossible to be more precise as tomatoes vary considerably in how juicy they are.

When they are ready the tomatoes should have the consistency of fresh sultanas. If you don't want to eat them over the next few weeks, store them dry in sealed plastic bags as they will keep longer. Squeeze as much air out as possible. Think vacuum pack. If you like to have your dried tomatoes in a seasoned olive oil with basil, thyme, oregano or garlic, it is best to add this when you are ready to eat them, or shortly before. Store them in the fridge for up to one month.

Tip: Don't throw away the seasoned oil as it is great for salad dressings.

Pickled walnuts

In June and July you can find green walnuts with a soft shell on the trees. When pickled, they are a wonderful accompaniment to cheese.

Wipe the walnuts well.

Prick them each side with a fork. Wear gloves as walnut juice stains.

Put them in a basin and cover with saline solution: half a pound of salt to 4 pints of water. Cover and soak for eight days. Then drain and put in a fresh saline solution and leave for four more days.

Wash and dry the nuts well.

Lay them out in fresh air, in the sun ideally, turning them over from time to time until they blacken. This usually takes two to three days.

Pack walnuts in clean jars. Pour over hot spiced vinegar and seal them when they are cold. Store for six weeks, before eating.

Spiced vinegar

For every five cups of white vinegar:

2 tablespoons peppercorns

2 walnut sized pieces of dried ginger root

2 tablespoons of whole allspice

Crush the spices a little to bruise them.

Tie in a clean cloth. Boil with the vinegar in a covered enamel or stainless steel pan for ten minutes. Allow to cool.

Drying beans

You can either grow beans specifically for drying (like the speckled Borlotti bean) or, if you leave your French beans a little longer, they will turn into haricot beans towards the end of summer. Beans for drying are removed from their pods and kept in a warm, airy place until they are completely dry. They should be dry enough to smash into smithereens if tapped gently with a hammer. In airtight containers they will keep for months.

Wild food

NETTLE RECIPES

Stinging nettles are a rich source of calcium, magnesium, iron and trace elements as well as a range of vitamins. They are good for people as well as plants! The young shoots can be used in place of spinach.

The best time to pick them is in spring. Once in flower they are overblown. To get round this in summer cut them down and let them shoot up again. Only pick the tender top four leaves to use as greens. Nettles make a good spinach substitute and are particularly recommended by the Wild Food School for *sag aloo*. The older leaves can be used in soups. If you want to remove the sting, put them in a plastic bag in the freezer overnight or pour warm water over them.

To make cold nettle tea, pour hot water over a few sprigs and leave until the water turns green.

HEDGEROW JAM

8 oz rosehips, 1 lb blackberries, 8 oz haws, 1lb elderberries, 8 oz sloes, 4 oz hazelnuts, 8 oz rowanberries, 1lb crab apples. Sugar.

Wash the fruit well. Put rosehips, haws, rowanberries, sloes and chopped crab apples into pan. Add water to cover and cook until tender. Sieve and weigh the pulp. Put it into a pan with the blackberries, elderberries and chopped nuts and simmer for 15 minutes. Add 2lbs sugar plus the weight of the pulp in sugar. Cook over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved. Boil rapidly until setting point is reached and pot.

Recipe thanks to the Wild Food School, Lostwithiel, Cornwall. For more recipe ideas from the Wild Food School, the *FAST Wild Food Cookbook* can be downloaded free from <http://www.countrylovers.co.uk/wildfoodjj/fastfood.pdf>.