

HERBAL CHRISTMAS CHEER

“Let food be your medicine, and your medicine, food.” (Aristotle, described as the ‘Father of Medicine’)

The herbs that we can easily buy to improve the flavour of our food also have medicinal value. If you make your own soups and stews, make a habit of adding herbs and/or spices. You will get to know the tastes you like by experimenting. Fresh herbs and spices such as Rosemary, Thyme, Sage, Basil, Marjoram, Mint, Fennel, Bay, Parsley, Dill, Chives, Tarragon, Coriander, Oregano, Garlic, Ginger, Lemongrass, Chillies and dried herbs and spices – Nutmeg, Cinnamon, Allspice, Caraway seed, Coriander seed, Cardamom and Mustard seed add medicinal value to your food. By adding any of these, you are using herbal medicine to improve your digestion and help your body absorb the vitamins and minerals from your food; giving your immune system a helping hand to prevent colds, flu and infections; improving your mood and ability to cope with stress by the benefits of the general tonic effects of these herbs and spices on the whole body.

Here are some recipes containing herbs and some suggestions that you might enjoy making, eating and drinking in the festive season and over the cold winter months.

Soups with herbs and spices.

These can be made with any vegetables and herbs already mentioned or you might think of others for example, nettle tops make a nutritious vegetable.

Try: -

Bean and Parsley; Duck and Ginger; Curried Coriander; Lentil with a mix of Parsley, Tarragon, Lemon Thyme, Lovage, and Chervil; Pumpkin and Basil; Green pea and Mint; Cauliflower and Chervil.

Meat dishes.

Any meat that you grill or roast can be coated beforehand in a mixture of honey and chopped herbs, like pork chops with honey, Mustard and Thyme or lamb with Sage and Garlic. Try herbed chicken drumsticks – rub a little olive or sunflower oil on the drumsticks, coat them in chopped Rosemary and Marjoram and roast in a medium oven for an hour or until cooked through. Stuff poultry with a herb and breadcrumb mixture for extra flavour and to make it go further if you have several mouths to feed. Lamb mince goes well mixed with fresh Mint and Chives and made into meatballs.

Herbal vinegars and oils.

Add them to soups and salads or put them into nice bottles and give them as Christmas presents.

Pack a glass jar with fresh herbs or 1/2 that amount of dried herbs, cover with vinegar (wine or cider is best), leave to steep for 2 weeks shaking occasionally, then strain and bottle. For a well flavoured cooking oil or for sprinkling on top of pizzas, add a sprig of Rosemary, a few garlic cloves and chillies to olive oil.

Sweet things.

You can add a few crushed Lavender flowers to icing sugar to spread on biscuits and cakes. A spicy fruitcake has ground Coriander, Aniseed, Cinnamon and Nutmeg added to make it taste extra delicious and improve your digestion at the same time.

Drinks.

Here are a couple of warming drinks (borrowed from W. Paterson's book, "A Country Cup").

Mulled ale - Heat a pint of beer with sugar to taste, add a small Cinnamon stick and a grating of Nutmeg. Do not boil but strain and serve hot.

King's Cup - Ingredients: 2 pints of strong (Scottish) ale, 1/2 a pint of brandy, 1 pint of water, 4oz or 100grams of brown sugar, 1 lemon, Cloves, Cinnamon, Ginger, Nutmeg to taste, 2 slices of toast (yes that's right!). Method: dissolve the sugar in the water, slice the lemon into it and let it stand for 15 minutes. Add the Cloves and Cinnamon, pour in the brandy and ale and stir well. Put in the toast, stir and sprinkle the Nutmeg and Ginger over it. Enjoy!

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