



FOOD &amp; WINE

# ConnoisseurConnections

A PUBLICATION EXCLUSIVELY FOR FOOD & WINE CONNOISSEUR CLUB MEMBERS

## Cross-Over Herbs: Flavorful Liaisons

Some culinary pairings are so intensely familiar we can smell and taste them with a single mention. No association is more intimate than that between herbs and foods. Consider apples and cinnamon, basil and tomatoes, rosemary and lamb. Their time-honored use brings renewed contentment with each application. Yet these classic combinations are not impervious to change. In fact, for the adventurous cook, innovative uses of herbs and spices may be the last domain for uncharted culinary exploration.

First, a clarification of the distinction between seasoning and flavoring to help get you started on your search for a new taste sensation. Strictly speaking, when you "season" a food you are enhancing its natural flavor, not changing it. The addition of seasonings is typically done at the end of the cooking process when you taste, evaluate and "adjust" the flavor. While salt is still the most widely used seasoning, a squeeze of fresh lemon juice into a lentil soup or scattering of

snipped dill over an omelet can be all that is needed to ready those dishes for the table.

Flavoring, on the other hand, uses ingredients like herbs and spices to enhance the original flavor of a food or to create a new flavor. The intent is always to give heightened interest to the dish, not to mask natural flavors, such as when nutmeg is added

to a cream sauce. Flavoring ingredients may be added at the beginning, middle or end of the cooking process depending on the form being used, cooking medium and cooking time.

Further clarification of the difference between herbs and spices may also prove useful on your organoleptic excursion. Herbs are limited to the leaves of certain edible, flavorful plants, while spices include the buds, fruits, flowers, bark, seeds and roots of plants and trees, often from tropical zones. Both are available fresh, dried or frozen and have a limited shelf life to retain optimal flavor.

While herb and spice charts are plentiful, most are constrained by the coupling of savory spices with meats and vegetables and aromatic herbs to desserts and confections. But these long-sanctioned relationships need not inhibit your pursuit of palate pleasure. It's time to cross the lines, blur the distinctions and make flavorful liaisons your passion.



When traveling without a road map towards new herbal destinations, take inspiration from old cookbooks. Kitchen gardens of the 18th and 19th centuries contained extensive herb collections. Their creative application was necessary to both enhance a bland and monotonous food supply and to extend the storage and preservation of a limited one. Don't be surprised if you find a lamb shank stew in fennel sauce or summer fruit compote spiked with bay leaf. For these chefs, necessity was truly the mother of invention.



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