

**All Gardens
Great & Small**
by
York Co.
Horticultural Agent
Tom Becker



Storing Homegrown Herbs

This is the fourth article in a series on growing herbs. Gardeners find growing fresh herbs a rite of spring.

Do your parsley flakes turn faded and flat tasting? What's the best way to store herbs? Culinary herbs can be eaten fresh, dried or frozen for later use. Stalks of basil, parsley, rosemary, thyme, mints, sage and others can be collected early in the morning just after the dew has dried on the foliage. It is at this time of day when their essential oils are at their peak. Rinse the herbs to remove any dust or dirt and pat dry with paper towels.

Store the herbs in glass containers with airtight lids in a cool, dry location. Keep them out of direct

sunlight preferably in the dark. Store them at 70°F or less.

The shelf life of herbs vary. For whole leaves and flowers, store for one year only. Ground-up herbs last six months.

For long term storage, freezing is a quick method of storing herbs for cooked dishes. Your harvested herbs can be chopped or packaged whole in small plastic bags, labeled and placed directly into the freezer. Another freezer method is herb cubes. Place chopped herbs in an ice cube tray. Fill with water and freeze. When frozen they can be popped out and tossed into soups, casseroles, and stews.

Place harvested herbs on drying racks made of screens or cheesecloths trays. Small bundles of herbs can be tied and hung in a

dry, well-ventilated room away from direct sunlight. Sunlight will break down the essential oils and reduce flavor quality.

Excessive moisture also causes reduced flavor. Eventually herbs will turn moldy. Your herbs will be dry enough to store when the foliage crumbles in your hand. Check for condensation inside the jars. This is a sign that the herbs were not completely dry and should be removed and dried more thoroughly. For the best quality store the leaves whole and crush just before using.

You can also experiment with oven and microwave drying. In a conventional oven herbs can be spread on oven racks or cookie sheets and dried at 120°F until they crumble in your hand. The amount of time for drying will depend on the type and quantity of herbs being dried. Herbs being dried in the microwave can be placed in between several sheets of paper towel and dried at a medium power for 2-3 minutes at a time until crumbly.

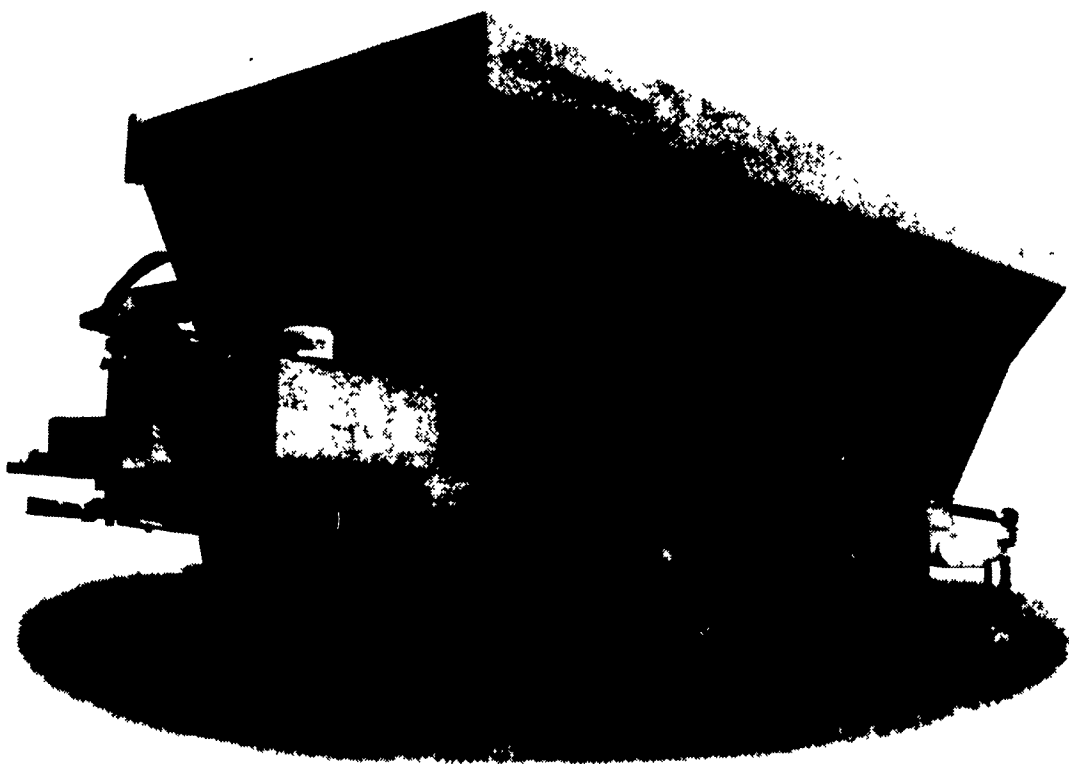
Finally handle herbs with care. Always use clean dry utensils when handling herbs.

Questions on the above may be directed to Thomas S. Becker, Extension Agent-Horticulture, 112 Pleasant Acres Road, York PA 17402. Phone number is 840-7408.



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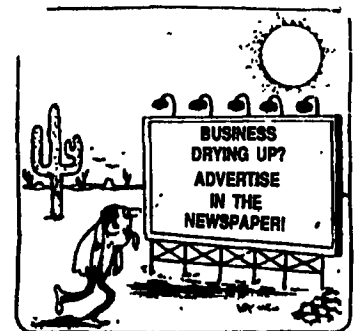
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