



How to Dry Herbs



by Paige Russell

Have you ever bought a bunch of fresh herbs for a recipe and then been faced with leftover sprigs. You tell yourself that you will use them, because they are so fresh and beautiful – but two weeks later you pull them out of the fridge, forgotten, limp and unusable?

Well, not to worry. I have a very simple solution to ease your conscience and keep your dinner plates

rich in flavor.

Drying/Dehydrating is the oldest form of food preservation. And air-drying herbs is the easiest form of this preservation technique. In this instructable, I'll show you how to best dry and preserve extra herb bounty!



Step 1: Safe Home Food Preservation



This recipe is a project that I made to go with my Instructables Canning & Preserving Class. I will not be going over all the safety ins and outs of drying and dehydrating for food preservation in this instructable, so I highly recommend that you read through Lessons 1 & 6 of my class before you give this a go!

Step 2: Supplies

- fresh herbs
- baker's twine or rubber bands
- scissors
- clothespins
- storage containers
- labels or masking tape

Optional:

- brown lunch bags
- hole punch

Step 3: Drying Hearty Herbs



If you're harvesting your own herbs to dry, it's best to pick them on the morning you plan to hang them, after the dew has dried. This will help prevent wilting. If you're buying herbs from the farmers market, handle them gently and keep them in water like cut flowers until you're ready to prepare them for drying.

Remove any dirt and dark, crushed, or otherwise unappealing leaves. Wash the remaining leaf filled stems carefully and lay them out on paper towel or a clean kitchen towel to air dry.

Herbs that do best with air drying in small bunches are the following **less tender varieties**:

- rosemary
- sage
- thyme
- summer savory
- parsley



Divide them into small bunches and either wrap the bundle ends in butcher's twine for hanging, or use a rubber band to secure them. I prefer the twine because the dangling length offers more options for ways to hang the bunches.



NOTE: It's important the bunches are small otherwise, the moisture can get trapped near where the ends come together and cause mold to grow.



The herbs retain the best color and flavor if they are dried in a well ventilated indoor area that is out of direct sunlight. I like to use clothespins to hang them from a suspended dowel, but you can really hang them from anything as long as it's in an appropriate location.

Step 4: Drying Tender Herbs



The following **tender leaf herbs** have a higher moisture content and benefit from being dried inside paper bags with holes cut out of them for air flow. (The bag absorbs some of that extra moisture.):

- basil
- oregano
- tarragon
- lemon balm
- mints

Here's how to prepare a bag for drying herbs in:

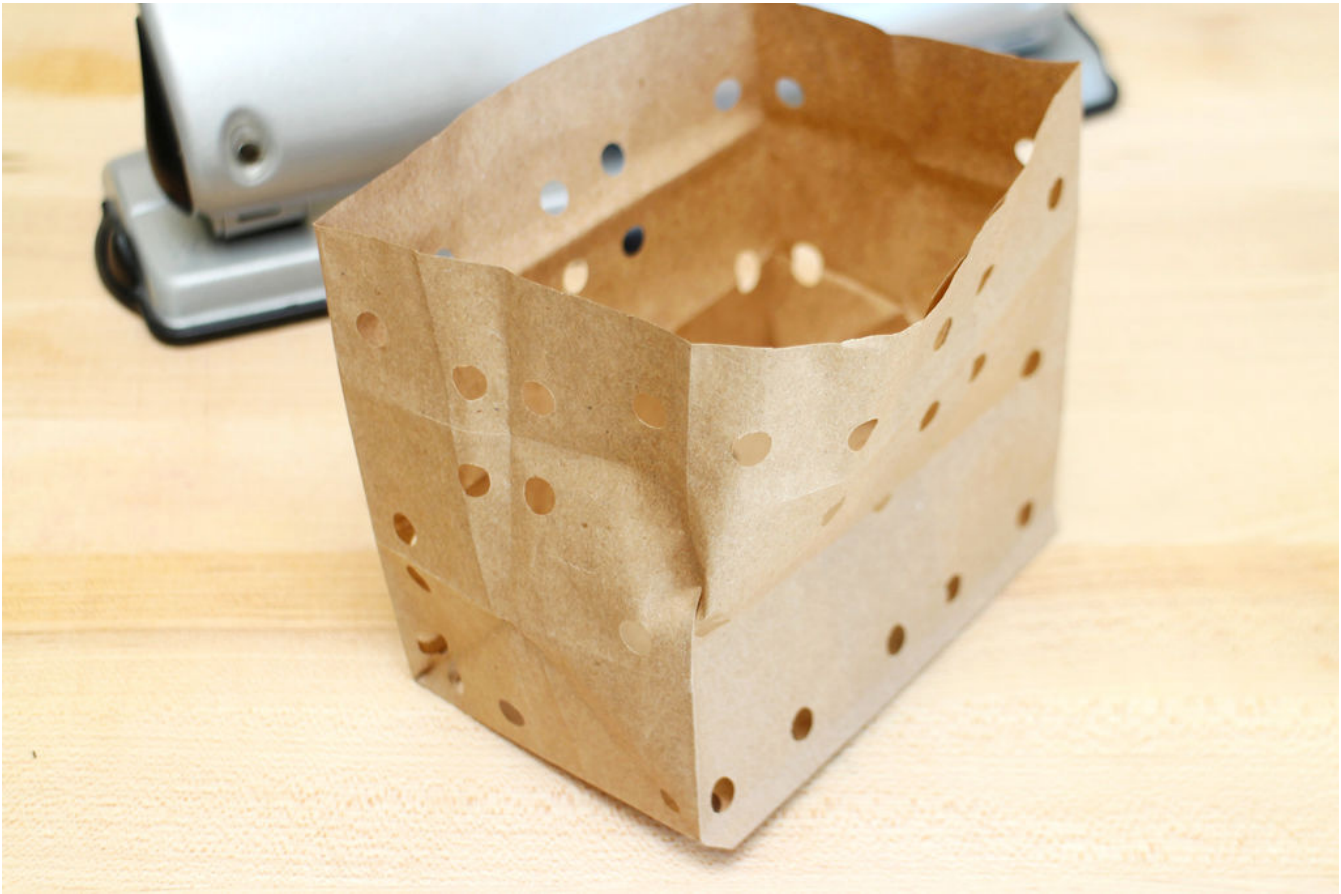


Cut down a standard paper lunch bag so that it's slightly shorter than the herb bundle it will envelope.





Use scissors or a hole punch to cut holes in the bag for air flow, making sure to put one in the center of the bottom of the bag for the string and herb stems to go through.



Like so!



String the end of the twine up through the hole in the bottom of the bag and pull the herb bunch up until the stem ends poke through.



It is now ready to be hung and dried in a well ventilated indoor area that is out of direct sunlight. Depending on the humidity in your house, air drying herbs should take anywhere from 4-7 days.

Step 5: How to Tell When They're Completely Dry

Herbs dried either way are ready to be put in storage containers when they are crispy dry and crumble easily when crushed between your thumb and forefinger.

Beautiful dried herbs!

NOTE: Another way to dry larger leaved herbs like mint, sage, and bay is to remove the individual leaves from the stems and lay them in single layers, without touching, on paper towel. Top with another paper towel and continue layering and stacking leaves and paper towels. You can go as high as five layers! Leave the stack in the (cold) oven overnight and the oven light of an electric or pilot light of a gas range is plenty warm to help these dry out quickly (but not too quickly).



Step 6: Storing Dried Herbs



Like so!



Once the herb bunches are dry, remove the leaves by running your (clean) thumbnail down the stem, scraping off the leaves or picking the larger ones off one by one.

Store the herbs in airtight containers (I love using canning jars).



herbs.

Label/date the freshly filled airtight containers and store in a cool, dry, dark place like a cupboard or pantry. As long as moisture doesn't get introduced into the containers, the dried foods should last indefinitely.

NOTE: Dried herbs are 3 - 4 times stronger than fresh herbs, so when replacing fresh with dried in a recipe that calls for fresh, add 1/4 to 1/3 the amount of dried

Step 7: To the Pantry and Beyond!



For more drying/dehydrating projects and to learn about other food preservation methods like:

- Canning
- Vinegar Pickling
- Lacto-fermentation

Enroll in my free online Instructables Canning & Preserving Class!