

Among sage's many uses is adding flavor to food

Wise cooks have long known the virtues of sage. A native of the Mediterranean and a member of the mint family, it was a highly regarded item in both Greek and Roman pantries and pharmacopoeia.

Among the palliative powers attributed to sage was the ability to soothe both nerves and stomach, and ancient sages as revered as Socrates, Hippocrates and Galen all admired the herb for its medicinal effects.

The Roman Aulus, who penned one of the first cookbooks in history, recommended the use of sage in various dishes.

And many Greeks, themselves anonymous, made annual offerings of sage leaves to Cadmus, the legendary hero whose deeds included the discovery of sage's curative powers.

During the Middle Ages and after, sage was a standard ingredient in a wide range of dishes throughout Europe.

It was among the herbs Charlemagne required, and the Crusaders believed that it was an effective remedy against poison and venom.

And the Druids, the ancient inhabitants of the British Isles, who believed sage to have the powers to revive the dead, would certainly have agreed with the German botanist Paulinus, who in the 1600s penned a volume of over 400 pages on the subject of sage, aptly entitling it "The Sacred Herb."

Sage's culinary uses today are less widespread than its longstanding reputation would lead one to expect.

Commonly used to flavor sausages, poultry, game and liver, fresh sage leaves have a fragrant and a savor reminiscent of lemon and resin.

In dried sage, the citrusy effect all but disappears, leaving in its place a pleasing musky scent.

The British traditionally serve duck accompanied by a sage and onion stuffing, and enjoy a special Derbyshire cheese streaked green by the juice of sage leaves.

Americans use sage chiefly in poultry stuffings, which is a shame, because it is far more versatile than that.

Provençal chefs use sage in their traditional garlic soup, and to flavor boiled chestnuts.

On the sour side, sage leaves can be pickled; on the sweet, they add an unusual flavor to dessert fritters. And, sage tea has long been imbued to ensure both an even temper and a long life.

The following recipes celebrate sage's versatility as a culinary additive. Both Minestrone alla Milanese and Fagioli con Peperoni recipes reproduced from "Cooking from an Italian Garden" (Holt, Rinehart and Winston) by Paola Scaravelli and John Cohen, demonstrate sage's affinity with various vegetables.

Another vegetable that's a natural with sage is eggplant, whose smoky flavor is a fitting complement to sage's own. The recipe below, for Melanzane Marinata (Marinated Eggplant), is a case in point. It's reproduced from "Pasta and Rice Italian Style" (Plume) by Efrim Fungli Colognato and Jacquelyn Days Swere.

MINESTRONE ALLA MILANESE
(Milanese Vegetable Soup)
Serves 6 to 8

- 2 tbsp. butter
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 cup finely chopped or shredded carrots
- 2 cups finely chopped or shredded leeks
- 2 cups finely chopped or shredded carrots
- 1 cup finely chopped or shredded celery
- 1 cup finely chopped or shredded potatoes
- 3 cups shredded cabbage

- 2 tsp. chopped parsley
- 2 tsp. chopped basil
- 1 tsp. crushed sage
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper (optional)
- 1 cup seeded, peeled, and chopped fresh tomatoes, or 1 cup chopped canned Italian plum tomatoes
- 1/4 cup Arborio rice
- 1 cup fresh or frozen peas
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan

Heat the butter and olive oil in a large saucepan, add the onions and leeks, and saute until they begin to color. Stir in the carrots and saute another few minutes. Add the remaining vegetables, except the peas and tomatoes, one at a time in the order listed above, sauteing each for a few minutes before adding the next one.

When all the vegetables have been added, blend in 6 to 7 cups of water, the parsley, basil, sage, bay leaves, and cayenne pepper (if desired), and simmer, covered, for 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Add water as required.

After cooking the vegetables for an hour, add the tomatoes and simmer another 15 minutes. Stir in the rice and peas and cook until the rice is done. Adjust for salt and pepper. Serve with grated Parmesan for those who want to add it.

FAGIOLI CON PEPERONI
(Beans with Peppers and Herbs)
Serves 6

- 1 cup dried white beans, or 2 cups canned Italian white beans
- 1 tsp. flour (optional)
- 2 tsp. olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped

- 1 medium carrot, finely chopped
- 1 stalk celery, finely chopped
- 1 hot pepper, fresh or dried, seeded and chopped
- 1 tsp. crushed dried sage
- 2 tsp. finely chopped parsley
- 1 large red or green bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- Freshly ground pepper to taste

Soak the dried beans for 8 hours or overnight in 3 cups of water with 1 tablespoon of flour. The flour softens the skin of the beans. Drain, rinse, and cook in 4 cups of water until tender, about 1 hour. Drain and set aside. As an alternative, cook in a pressure cooker for 25 minutes, drain, and set aside. If canned beans are used, omit soaking with water and flour and simply drain before assembling the rest of the dish.

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan or frying pan, add the onion, carrot, and celery and saute over a medium heat, stirring for 5 minutes. Serve hot.

MELANZANE MARINATA
(Marinated Eggplant)
For 4

- 1 eggplant (1 1/2 to 1 3/4 lbs.)
- Salt
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 large garlic clove, mashed
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped
- 8 to 10 fresh sage leaves, chopped, or 1 tsp. dried sage
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar

1. Wash and dry the eggplant, and cut crosswise into 1/4-inch slices. Place the slices in a colander, sprinkle with 1 tsp. salt, and let drain for 30 to 40 minutes.

2. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Dry the eggplant thoroughly with paper towels. When the oil is very hot, slide in the eggplant slices in a single layer. Fry quickly over high heat until tender and slightly browned. Drain on brown paper. Continue this process with the rest of the eggplant.

3. Place a layer of eggplant on the bottom of a shallow serving dish. Sprinkle with some of the garlic, some of the parsley, and a little sage. Repeat the process with one or two more layers.

4. In a small saucepan bring the vinegar to a boil over high heat. Pour the vinegar over the eggplant.

5. Cover the eggplant, and let marinate for at least 12 hours.

Note: For best results this dish should be prepared a day in advance. It does not have to be refrigerated.

Estimated Cooking Time: 30 minutes. Estimated Total Preparation Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes.

LESS FOLSKY and more elegant is the following recipe for Roasted Breast of Veal with Herbs and Carrots.

Reproduced from "The Low-Calorie Gourmet" (Times Books) by Pierre Franey and Richard Flato, it's a flavorful treat for the calorie-conscious person who enjoys eating well.

ROASTED BREAST OF VEAL WITH HERBS AND CARROTS

- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/4 tsp. dried thyme
- 1/4 tsp. dried rosemary
- 1/4 tsp. dried sage
- 1 4-lb. over-ready breast of milk-fed veal

- 1/4 tsp. salt
- Freshly ground black pepper (8 turns of the pepper mill)
- 2 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 2 onions (1 1/2 lbs.), cut into 1/4-inch cubes (rota (1 1/2 lbs.), trimmed and scraped, cut into 1 1/2-inch lengths (3 cups)

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

2. Chop very finely and blend together the garlic, bay leaf, thyme, rosemary, and sage.

3. Place the meat in a shallow roasting pan that fits it well. Rub the meat all over with the herb-and-garlic mixture. Sprinkle it with salt and pepper and rub it with the oil.

4. Place the roasting pan in the bottom of the oven and brown the meat on each side, about 10 minutes on a side. Pour off all the fat from the roasting pan. Place the onions and around the meat. Lower the oven temperature to 375 degrees. Brown the onions for about 5 minutes.

5. Add the wine and chicken stock and cover tightly with foil. Cook for about 30 minutes. Add the carrots. Cover again and bake for 30 minutes more. Skim away the fat and serve the meat with its own sauce and the vegetables.

YIELD: 8 servings.

Calories per serving: 393.

Presentation: The meat should be carved very thinly. Do this by slicing it on the bias over the bone. (This method leaves a lot of good meat between the bones, although I can offer no elegant way of eating it). An alternative is to cut down between the bone as with ribs. Place slices of the meat in the center of the plate, surrounded by the carrots and sauce. If available, a few whole small leeks placed around the periphery of the plate add to the color.

A quiche quickly

Here's a party dish that combines the best of two favorites... the quiche and the Reuben sandwich.

QUICHE REUBEN QUICHE

- 1 9-inch frozen pie shell
- 1/2 cup chopped corned beef
- 1 cup (8 oz.) sauerkraut, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup grated Swiss cheese
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1 1/2 tsp. Dijon mustard

Preheat oven to 375 degrees and place a cookie sheet on middle rack. Spread the chopped corned beef on bottom of the pie shell. Top with sauerkraut and Swiss cheese. Beat eggs with milk and mustard. Pour into pie shell and place on cookie sheet. Bake for 30 minutes or until filling is nicely browned. Serves three or four.

For a copy of The Sauerkraut Book, featuring classic and contemporary recipes from around the world, write to Silver Plass, c/o Comstock Foods, P.O. Box 141, Newark, N.Y. 14513. Please include 50 cents for postage and handling and a Silver Plass label.

Sardines in pita

Since flavor, not nutrition, is usually uppermost in the minds of the hungry, it's nice to know that the sardine is delicious eaten as is. It can also be turned into a rare treat like this sandwich below, a very contemporary recipe:

PITA PORT CLYDE

- 3 cans (3 1/2 oz.) sardines, drained (oil, mustard or tomato flavor)
- 2 hard-cooked eggs, chopped
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup chopped celery
- 1/4 cup minced green pepper
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 or 4 pita loaves
- Lettuce
- Sliced tomato
- Alfalfa sprouts

Mix two cans of sardines with eggs, mayonnaise, celery, green peppers, salt and pepper. Halve and open pita bread. Line with lettuce, fill with sardine-egg filling. Add sliced tomato, alfalfa sprouts from remaining can and alfalfa sprouts. Makes for servings.

For more recipes write to: Naturally Nutritious, P.O. Box 1769, Portland, ME 04104.

Innovate in space

The Space Shuttle has opened an entirely new era in space flight — and that includes a new system of feeding the crew.

Shelf life, storage temperature, volume and weight have been primary considerations in developing the food system for the Shuttle. But so have nutrition, variety and palatability.

Even in orbit, it shouldn't be hard to take shrimp cocktail, beef steak, rice pilaf, broccoli au gratin and butterscotch pudding. They were on one of the dinner menus during Columbia's first flight.

A recent *Journal of The American Dietetic Association* reveals fascinating details of the Shuttle food system and the Shuttle Galley to be installed when Operations Missions begin.

Connie R. Stadler, a registered dietitian of Technology Inc., Houston, was team dietitian for the challenging job of providing a safe and nutritious food supply for Columbia that could be manipulated with ease in the null-gravity environment.



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