

INVITING IDEAS

Save the remnants of summer garden

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Cool weather is coming and the gardens are going to seed - time to get the last remnants of summer, dried or preserved. This activity seems a bit anticlimactic come late September - invite some friends to spend a day of gathering, preserving and cooking - make the most of the

fruits of your labor, and share the goodies with those that help. Green tomatoes still left on the vine? Make a batch of pickled green tomatoes, green tomato chutney, or batter and fry up some Southern fried green tomatoes. Pepper plants still fruiting? I'm still picking my cayennes, hot cherry peppers, and anchos - which have been very late this year. Cayennes are great dried - you can dry them by hanging them in a mesh bag and hanging them in a warm area, by placing them on a wire rack, much like sundrying tomatoes, or by threading them. Once your peppers are dry, you can split them and put them into a bottle of vinegar or oil, dry and reconstitute them when needed, or grind them into powder and use them to spice up any dish.

My big harvest is always my herbs (I harvest the bulk of them when the plants that are ready to flower, and rich in essential oils - usually in late July or early August). Even in nippy weather, morning gatherings are best. When cutting your herbs, leave a lot of stem - if bottom leaves are tough, remove them. Gently wash the herbs - let dry on paper toweling or on clean cloth kitchen towels.

Bunch drying/Bag drying: place 6-10 stems per brown paper sack - large enough so the herbs don't touch the sides of the bag. Loosely tie the end of the sack leaving approximately 2 inches of stem showing. Hang the bags with leaves facing down in a warm, "airy" room with little light. Bag drying also allows for seeds to be caught for saving, and protects the herbs from collecting dust. When the leaves of your herbs are thoroughly dry (brittle) remove leaves from their stems and store in air-tight

containers.

Herb rack method: use an antique or hand-built herb rack. This method provides an alternative to hanging culinary herbs from a beam or hooks in the ceiling. Hang the herbs upside down on the rack in small tied bunches - do not place too close together.

Wire mesh rack: spread herbs in a thin layer - as with other drying methods, make sure there is little light and lots of air circulating in the room. Gently stir the herbs from day to day to enable even drying.

Freezer preservation: this method works best on culinary herbs that have soft leaves. Parsley, chives and basil are best preserved in this method. Pick freezable herbs early in the morning when dew is still clinging to them - rinse them gently and shake off excess water. Place the herbs in small freezer bags. Use frozen herbs as you would fresh.

Dill and coriander are best preserved when pureed with a small amount of water and placed in ice cube trays - once frozen place herb cubes in plastic bags and use in sauces, soups and stews.

Dried and frozen herbs are best used within one year - label them! Like other foodstuffs, do not refreeze once defrosted.

HERB IDEAS FOR THE HOLIDAYS AND FOR HOSTESS GIFTS

Small tied bunches of herbs make for great basting brushes - these can be used all year round, for use in grilling in or outdoors.

Make your own Herbs de Provence - a combination of: thyme, lavender, rosemary, summer savory and basil. This wonderful combination is delicious on tomato-based foods and lamb!

Give a selection of Bouquet Garni as gifts - traditionally a combination of parsley, thyme and bay leaves, try using different herbs to make up interesting flavors - tie up herbs in a small piece of muslin and secure with kitchen twine or place herbs in a sterling silver antique tea strainer and give as a very special gift.

Develop an assortment of herbed

salts - add your favorite herb(s) to coarse salt (Kosher or Sea) grind and place in an attractive air-tight container.

Give a gift of beautifully tied assorted herbs (use hand dyed yarns or string) label them and indicate they are for throwing over coals when grilling.

Make herb butters - place in interesting crocks (new or antique). If using for the holidays - freeze.

Make herb wreaths by glue-gunning herb leaves on a grape vine (bay leaves work great - then paint with gold gilt).

Make big batches of soup loaded with herbs - freeze in individual containers and give as gifts - especially to those single friends that only eat microwave quickies.

Make herb vinegars and oils - place in interesting and unique bottles. Flavored vinegar is one of those wonderful no-brainers! When making vinegar; always use a high quality wine vinegar - herbs and flavors will not mask poor vinegar quality, make sure all of your equipment is washed in hot soapy water and rinsed in hot clear water, use fresh, unblemished herbs - discard any leaves that are brown or bug-eaten.

TARRAGON VINEGAR

1.4-liter, 16-cup glass jar with gas-tight lid

16 cups Champagne vinegar

2 teaspoons sugar

Large bunch of fresh tarragon, lightly bruised

4-6 small, fresh, hot peppers - slit, not sliced

5 large cloves garlic, peeled

2 teaspoons coriander seeds

1 teaspoon melange (multi-colored) of whole peppercorns

Warm the champagne vinegar with two teaspoons of sugar in a large non-reactive pot.

Place the tarragon, hot peppers, garlic, coriander seeds and peppercorns in the glass jar.

Pour the warmed vinegar into the jar and seal. Place the steeping jar into a dark, cool room for 4 weeks.

Strain the steeped vinegar. Using a funnel, fill the glass bottles and add fresh sprigs of tarragon and a small whole pepper or two. Cork or seal the bottles.

Ruth Mossok Johnston is an author and food columnist who lives in Franklin. To leave a Voice Mail message for Ruth, dial (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1902.

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Harvest Happening celebrates fall

English Gardens will celebrate fall with its fourth annual Harvest Happening 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 5, and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 6, at English Gardens in West Bloomfield. English Gardens is at 6370 Orchard Lake Road at Maple. Call (810) 851-7506.

Talk features New Zealand roses

The next meeting of the Metropolitan Rose Society will take place 7 p.m. Friday, Oct. 4, at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center, 3500 Marals, east of Crooks and south of 13

Harvest Happening is filled with a variety of family-oriented activities, including a petting zoo, country music and ongoing fall decorating demonstrations. Each store will also feature free children's activities, such as straw mazes, decorating mini pumpkins and a tulip bulb search.

Mile.

Spencer Bunny Skran will present a slide show of roses and gardens of New Zealand.

The public may attend.