

# Herbal Wreaths for Soups, Stews and Braises

By Jen Lenharth

Herbal wreaths are an easy and beautiful way to season food. Herbs add flavor without adding calories and fat. Any of the standard cooking herbs can be used. It's best to use long-stemmed herbs, to make it easier and more fun to weave. Choose your herb variety based on personal taste and soup type.

Commonly used herbs: Rosemary, thyme, parsley, sweet marjoram, oregano, bay, sage, chives or onion leaves, garlic chives or garlic scapes.

Other great herbs to try: Savory, tarragon, basil, hyssop, chervil, celeriac leaves, small lovage leaves, lavender, lemongrass, winter savory, lemon basil, lemon balm, edible flowers, and small hot peppers.

## How to use an Herbal Soup Wreath:

Add a wreath to any pot of soup or stew or pop it into the broth of a braise while it is cooking. The herbal leaves will pass along their flavor to the broth as the dish cooks and some leaves such as the rosemary and thyme will fall off of the stems into broth. For soups that will cook longer than 30 minutes you may want to add the wreath for the last half hour of cooking time. When you are ready to serve simply remove the tied bundle of stems from the soup and enjoy.

**Do you like iced tea?** Make an herbal 'tea' wreath.

Choose a 'sweet' herb like mint as your base and add herbs such as lavender, any of the lemon herbs, thyme, and edible flowers

Add the herbal 'tea' wreath to your favorite tea while steeping or simply add the wreath to hot water for a lighter tasting tisane (herbal 'tea').

## How to Assemble:

1. Gather six or more sprigs of herbs in varying lengths 6-14 inches. Be sure that a sturdy herb such as rosemary or marjoram is your longest size.
2. Bend the longest sprig into a loop that is about 4 inches in diameter, twisting the ends around each other. Hold it together with your thumb and finger, then add another long-stemmed herb, twisting it over and around the first one and overlapping the ends of the first.
3. Continue adding additional sprigs — a piece of sage, some thyme, onion leaves, garlic chives and others — until your wreath looks full. If you plan to dry your wreath, keep in mind the wreath will shrink as it dries, so add enough herbs to keep it looking full after it dries.
4. Add a long leaf, such as an onion top from winter onions, a long blade of chives, or a leaf of lemongrass, at the very last, spiraling it like a ribbon all the way around to secure all of the

herbs and give it a finished look. If you are worried about the wreath holding together add a tie of kitchen twine

5. The two ends of the spiraled leaf can be tucked under some of the other herbs and any loose ends can be trimmed off with pruners. You also may want to tuck in a nice, small red pepper or a sprig of golden marjoram for some color. Chive flowers dry well, as do garlic chive blossoms and oregano. Tuck the stem into the wreath so it is secure.

You could use the herbal wreath today or store it for winter use by following the directions below.

## **Dry Your Wreath to Store and Enjoy Later**

It's important to dry your wreath out of light in order to maintain the vibrant color and flavor of your herbs. The simplest way is to dry them in a food dehydrator, on the lowest temperature control, one rack away from the heat source. Even the oven, without heat, works well. As a last resort, place the wreath in the bottom of a paper lunch bag, folded over the top and punched a hole at the fold and use string to hang from a hook in a dark, dry place, like a pantry or a cabinet. Do NOT dry the wreath in the microwave, it will just cook the oils and flavor out.

Check for dryness by crumbling one herb leaf. Check all over for mold. Wrap the completed wreath in tissue paper or seal it in a plastic sandwich bag and store it in an airtight container, out of light, until ready to use or give away.