

PENNY SAVER NEWS

May 9, 2013

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

e-mail: mkeith@ufl.edu

Remember Rosemary

Back in Shakespeare's time rosemary was considered the herb for memory. People put sprigs of it on graves to help them remember their loved ones. There doesn't seem to be any research saying that rosemary will help us improve, or keep, our memories. But rosemary is a great herb to use just for flavor, in dozens of dishes. And rosemary oil is an antioxidant that is used to help preserve flavor or color of some processed foods too. If you're not familiar with it, now's a good time to start.

Some people prefer rosemary in meat or fish dishes. Others like to use it to balance sweet flavors in cookies and breads. Either way, it works! The flavor is called sweet, pungent, fragrant, or like pine needles. And the leaves do look like pine needles, long and narrow. It grows in warm dry areas of the world, so those leathery needle-like leaves help it to hold onto its water. It will grow here too, but its biggest problem is too much water during our rainy seasons.

Those leaves dry well, so dried rosemary holds its flavor for quite some time. You can find dried rosemary in the spice section of the grocery. Whole leaves can be very strong if you bite into one. They can poke your tongue too. So it's better to tie them up in a bit of cheesecloth to make it easy to pull them out of the soup before it's served. If you're making a smooth sauce with rosemary in it, you can strain them out.

It's best to not chop or grind them until you're ready to use them, because once they're chopped the flavors will gradually disappear. Some recipes do call for chopping them, to release lots of flavor. Or you can just rub them between your hands to open them up some too. A bit of rosemary, some slices of lemon and maybe a clove or two of garlic stuffed into the cavity of a chicken while it roasts will do wonders for the flavor.

If you grow it, or if you prefer to buy fresh sprigs of rosemary, don't throw away the stems. It's super easy to just lay a whole sprig of rosemary on top of the meat, chicken or fish while it's cooking. It's easier to pull a whole sprig out of the stew too, instead of tying the leaves in cheesecloth. Those

woody stems are also good for cooking. Use them as skewers for tiny shish kebabs of meat, mushrooms or even fruits.

Another easy way to add rosemary flavor to foods is on the grill. Soak a whole sprig, some stems or just some leaves in water. Then lay them on the hot coals when you start the cooking. The smoke will carry the flavor to your dinner.

Besides meats, rosemary is wonderful in breads. If you're not up for baking your own you can still sprinkle a few leaves over Boboli or pizza crust before it goes in the oven. Brush bread dough or refrigerated dinner rolls with melted butter and sprinkle finely chopped rosemary over them before baking. Add a pinch to corn bread batter.

Many vegetables perk up with a little rosemary too. Add a bit to the water when you steam cauliflower, boil potatoes or stew tomatoes. Or add it to the oil to sauté spinach or mushrooms.

Don't forget the sweets too. Rosemary and lemon are a great combination, in cookies, sweet breads, even lemonade. Use a sprig of rosemary to stir the pitcher. It'll balance the sugary sweetness and have your guests asking for more.

It's a strong herb, so you won't need much. A teaspoon or two is plenty for a chicken. Half a teaspoon is enough for a pan of cornbread, or 2 cups of stewed tomatoes. As much as a tablespoon will flavor 6 cups of barbeque sauce.

Here's a dinner dish that's easy, inexpensive and flavorful. Add a dash of hot sauce if you want even more heat than the sausage gives.

Sausage Bean Casserole

1 pound pork sausage, hot or mild	1 Tbsp minced onion
1 clove garlic (or 1/8 tsp garlic powder)	¼ tsp thyme leaves
¼ tsp rosemary leaves	1 8-oz can tomato sauce
2 15-oz cans lima beans, drained	2 Tbsp margarine or butter
1 cup dry bread crumbs	1 Tbsp dried parsley

Preheat oven to 350° F. Fry sausage with onion and garlic until browned and crumbly. Drain off excess fat. Rub rosemary leaves between the palms of your hands until fragrant. Add to sausage with thyme and tomato sauce. Simmer 15 minutes. Add lima beans. Transfer to 1 ½ qt. baking dish. Mix crumbs and parsley in small bowl. Melt butter, drizzle over crumbs. Sprinkle over sausage mixture. Bake 1 hr. until golden on top. Serves 4-6.

Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M., University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.