

OREGANO



OREGANO (*Origanum vulgare*) is a perennial herb from the mint family. A rich, peppery, and savory herb, it is most familiar in thick red spaghetti sauce and on pizza. Used for the first time by ancient Greeks, oregano flourishes in the Mediterranean Basin and reaches to Central Asia. Oregano has thick green leaves and lavender-pink flowers that may or may not have bloomed by the harvest. Available mid summer in the Northeast, oregano is sold as fresh sprigs or chopped dry leaves. You may hear oregano called “wild marjoram” as these herbs have a similar flavor.



STORAGE

- ◆ **For short-term storage**, place oregano in the refrigerator in an airtight plastic container or place the stems upright in a jar of cold water on a refrigerator shelf. Try to change water regularly. Oregano should **last 2-3 weeks** stored this way.
- ◆ **For drying**, wash in cold water, drain, and dry thoroughly. Place in a brown paper bag and hang upside down by stems in a dark, dry place until herb crumbles easily, usually 2-3 weeks. When thoroughly dried, strip the leaves from their stems and store in airtight containers. Oregano will **last up to a year** stored this way.
- ◆ There are two methods **for freezing oregano**: 1) Wash, rinse, and pat dry. Then put in a plastic zip-lock bag and freeze. Remember to remove the air from the bag before sealing. 2) Break the leaves off of the stem and pack them into an ice cube tray. Fill the tray with water or olive oil and freeze it. You can add a frozen oregano cube to a soup, stir fry, or other cooked dish. Freezing may cause the leaves to blacken in color but it will not affect the taste.

PREPARATION

- ◆ Unlike other herbs, fresh oregano is nearly as strong as it is dried, and should be used in more or less the same proportion in recipes.
- ◆ **Wash** oregano well in a basin of water by holding the stems and swishing the leaves around to dislodge dirt or sand. Shake off excess water.
- ◆ **Crush leaf herbs**, such as oregano, thyme or basil, in your hand before use for a more immediate release of flavor.
- ◆ Use to season **fish, meats, salads, sauces, and stews**. It also complements **dried beans and aged cheeses like Parmesan and feta**, and most memorably, pizza.

Nutritional Information

Oregano contains vitamin C and rosmarinic acid, an antioxidant. Antioxidants help to prevent cell and tissue damage that could cause disease. Vitamin C is important in immune response, wound healing, and allergic reactions. Vitamin C also helps with iron absorption.

Oregano Recipes

Creamy Oregano Dip with Vegetables (Serves 6)

- 2 1/2 cups plain nonfat yogurt
- 2 Tablespoons fresh oregano, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon lemon peel, grated
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne
- Vegetables of choice (cherry tomatoes, carrot sticks, sliced peppers, etc.)



In a medium bowl, add yogurt, fresh and dried oregano, lemon peel, lemon juice, salt, pepper and cayenne. Stir to blend. Cover and refrigerate to develop flavors, at least 2 hours and up to 6 hours. Place bowl with dip on platter. Surround with vegetables and serve.

Recipe adapted from Food Down Under found at <http://fooddownunder.com/cgi-bin/recipe.cgi?r=74126>

Corn and Tomato Salad with Fresh Oregano

- 7 ears fresh corn
- 1 Tablespoons salt
- 5 Italian Roma tomatoes, diced
- 1 yellow pepper, diced
- 1 medium red onion, minced fine
- 1 Jalapeno chile, minced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 3 Tablespoons lime juice
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/8 cup fresh oregano leaves



Bring large pot of water to a boil and add salt. When it returns to the boil, add corn and cook 3 minutes. Remove from pot and set aside to cool. Depending on the size of your pot, you may need to cook the corn in shifts. When cool, cut corn from cobs with a sharp knife. In a large bowl, combine corn, tomatoes, yellow pepper and red onion. In a small bowl, whisk chiles, garlic, lime juice, salt and pepper. While whisking, drizzle in oil. Pour dressing over vegetables, stir gently to combine. Can be held in refrigerator 2 days or at room temperature 1 hour. Stir in oregano right before serving.

Recipe adapted from Food Down Under found at <http://fooddownunder.com/cgi-bin/recipe.cgi?r=66896>

Tomato and Herb Sauce (Serves 4)

- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 2 large leeks, white part only, washed and chopped
- 1 medium onions, chopped
- 4 large ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped (or one 16 oz. can chopped tomatoes)
- 1 Tablespoon fresh oregano, minced (or 1-1/2 teaspoons dried)
- salt and pepper to taste



In a medium skillet, over medium-flame heat, heat oil. When oil is hot, add leeks and onion. Reduce the heat to medium and sauté, stirring often, until vegetables are soft and limp. Add tomatoes and oregano, cook over medium heat until tomatoes reduce to a pulpy sauce, about 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper. Serve over pasta. Refrigerate up to 3 days, freeze up to 6 months.

Recipe adapted from The Essential Vegetarian Cookbook, by Diana Shaw, copyright 1997.