

# Seven Fresh Herbs of Summer, How to Use Them and Their Health Benefits

*By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author*

My wife and I recently moved out into the country, basically a half an hour from most civilization. Our farmhouse is on a one-acre plot of land surrounded by conservation land. One of the things that I have always wanted to do was to plant my own herbs for cooking, but it wasn't until we lived here that I began growing fresh herbs and using them in my recipes. There are so many benefits to growing your own herbs including saving a lot of money! Even if you don't grow your own, fresh herbs will not only add tremendous flavor to your recipes, but they also all have amazing potential health benefits. Most herbs will decrease inflammation and help with digestion, but they have other benefits as well. You don't need to overdo it with herbs, just use them in recipes both raw and cooked. Avoid overeating any herbs if you are pregnant.

Here are seven of the most popular summer herbs, what to do with them and their potential health benefits.

**Basil** – Basil is my favorite fresh summer herb. I make pesto as often as I can and I never seem to get sick of it. My favorite way to make a quick pesto is by adding the basil, pine nuts, olive oil, garlic and cheese to a cutting board and just chopping everything until.....yup! I have pesto! This means you can make it anywhere without the need of a food processor or mortar and pestle. [Click here for my video on making pesto without a food processor.](#)

**Potential health benefits** – Prevention of certain cancers, reduction of symptoms of depression, reduction of age-related memory loss, presence of anti-inflammatory properties. Basil may also protect against the risk of ulcers for those taking regular doses of aspirin.

**Mint** – Mint is one of the easiest herbs to grow. Once it gets going you might find it hard to stop! I make a delicious iced yerba mate drink with yerba mate (a high caffeine tea), honey, lemon juice and lots of fresh mint. Not only does it wake me up in the morning, but it gives me fresh breath also. [Here are some mint recipes from Eating Well magazine.](#)

**Potential health benefits** – May improve irritable bowel syndrome, reduce indigestion, increase brain function, decrease breastfeeding pain and may improve cold symptoms.

**Thyme** – Thyme is another relatively easy herb to grow. We have a large pot of it on our porch and I grab some when I am making chicken or potatoes. Sometimes, I use whole sprigs in chicken recipes and just remove the sprigs when cooking is complete. Thyme is used often in Mediterranean cooking and is especially good on meat and chicken, but also on vegetables. [Here are some vegetarian recipes using thyme from CookieandKate.com.](#)

**Potential health benefits** – May reduce blood pressure, protect against colon cancer, attack breast cancer cells, and act as an [anti-microbial](#).

**Parsley** – Parsley is used often as a garnish, but tastes amazing in many Mediterranean dishes. Tabouli is a parsley salad that will give you a medicinal dose of high-quality nutrients. Check out the traditional Lebanese Tabouli recipe from Malvina Salloom that we have included in this month's newsletter.

**Potential Health Benefits** – May prevent risk of cancer, decrease risk of diabetes, maintain eye health, improve bone health, and act as an antibacterial.

**Dill** – Dill is one of my favorite herbs as it offers a cooling flavor to whatever it is added to. The traditional Greek yogurt dip (Tzatziki) uses a lot of fresh dill. I also love it on potatoes, in beans and on chicken and fish. Right now, we are making lacto-fermented dill pickles that are out of this world delicious! [Here is our recipe for loaded tzatziki.](#)

**Potential health benefits** – May help to reduce depression, lower cholesterol, reduce menstrual cramps, reduce flatulence, act as a digestive aid and antimicrobial, and help with colds and flu.

**Oregano** – Oregano has been my go-to herb for years. It is great on everything from grilled bread to eggs to beans. Brittany Nickerson, author of The Herbalist's Kitchen shared this Oregano Pesto recipe with me. It is super delicious and a few tablespoons is a medicinal amount to eat.

[Oregano Pesto Recipe and Video.](#)

**Potential health benefits** – May help with colds, flu and fever. Has anti-inflammatory properties, could potentially act as an anti-cancer herb. Oregano may also help with digestion.

**Rosemary** – Rosemary is super easy to grow and its piney flavor goes a long way, so you don't have to use a lot of it in recipes. Rosemary adds so much to chicken, meat and potato dishes, but you can also use it in roasted cauliflower, mixed in with focaccia, as a topping for pizza or in a sauce for pasta.

**Potential health benefits** – Has anti-inflammatory properties, may improve brain function, increases circulation, may enhance memory and improve digestion.

I think that one of the reasons I feel so great in the summer is because of all the fresh herbs I am eating along with more fruits and vegetables. Try growing some of your own and let me know some of your favorite herb recipes!

