

Rosemary
*Audrey Alessi
Sunday, June 9, 2002

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is not just beholding of centuries of tradition and symbolism; it is a hardy, evergreen herb with a penetrating piney-woody aroma and a flavor impossible to forget. Brushing by a rosemary bush, releasing its pungent perfume is sure to invoke pure bliss.

Since the Middle Ages, rosemary has been associated with love and remembrance. As Shakespeare's Othelia told us, "Rosemary, that's for remembrance." In medieval Europe, sprigs of rosemary were placed into wine goblets to toast the bride. Romans were known to put rosemary branches into the hands of the dead, later becoming a European custom to plant rosemary at the gravesite.

Rosmarinus, meaning dew of the sea, is a member of the mint family and native to the Mediterranean where it grows wild in the salt spray. It is an evergreen in our north Florida climate. Upright varieties can reach five feet and prostrate varieties tend to creep or arch over rocks or walls.

Rosemary needs at least six hours of full sun, well-drained soil and good air circulation. It is relatively easy to grow as long as it s watered sparingly to prevent root rot. Fertilize by mulching with a light layer of compost or using fish emulsion or other organic fertilizer.
Regular

pinching and harvesting helps the plant branch and maintain a nice shape. Most rosemaries produce lavender-blue flowers, which are regularly visited by bumblebees. Note that the blossoms form on old growth, so flowers will be sparse if you are frequently harvesting.

Rosemary has a myriad of culinary uses in both savory and sweet recipes and it possesses many other uses as well. It is loaded with anti-oxidants and is widely used in Europe for medicinal purposes, such as a stimulant for the circulatory system, calming an upset stomach as a soothing tea, treating rheumatism, and to spur on an appetite. It is also a common ingredient in herbal shampoos. A friend puts a sprig or two into her liquid dish soap container, lending the soap a bright, fresh scent.

One of my first culinary experiences with rosemary was a meal of roasted chicken perfumed with this piney herb and flavored with fresh garlic and lemon sublime for sure! I was hooked after the first bite. Rosemary holds it own, whether stuffed into a chicken, layered with new potatoes,

drizzled with olive oil over chicken or fish or mixed into pound cake batter. You can also tie a few sprigs together and use as a basting brush while grilling fish. I sometimes whisk chopped rosemary into olive oil, balsamic vinegar and garlic for a quick marinade. I can use the bare stems as skewers for shrimp kabobs or simply add to the grill s fire to impart a smoky rosemary flavor to pork chops.

Whether entering a new relationship with rosemary or rekindling an old one, I am sure you will find this herb with its endless uses and evergreen beauty a delight in the kitchen as well as the garden. Here are a few of my favorite rosemary recipes.

Basic Rosemary Marinade

Makes about ½ cup. Whisk together:

- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 3 sprigs rosemary, crushed
- 3 large garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- 2-3 T balsamic vinegar
- pinch salt and freshly ground pepper

Soothing Rosemary Tea

Pour one cup of boiling water over 1 T. of dried rosemary or 3 T. fresh. Cover and steep the tea for a few minutes until tea reaches your desired strength. Then strain.

Rosemary Scented Nuts

Pre-heat oven to 350. Toast 4 cups shelled hazelnuts or other nuts in the oven until golden, about 10 min. Toss with 6 T. fresh chopped rosemary leaves, 1-2 tsp. cayenne pepper, 2 T. brown sugar, 2 tsp. coarse salt and 3 T. melted butter.

Skewered Shrimp

Soak 4-6 rosemary branches in water for several hours. Strip off most of the leaves. Skewer 4-6 shrimp on each branch and brush with olive oil. Season with salt and grill over a hot fire 3-4 min. per side.

For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

*Audrey Alessi is a horticulturist at Native Nurseries and a member of the University of

Florida IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee. She teaches many of the cooking with herb workshops offered there.