

F L O R I D A



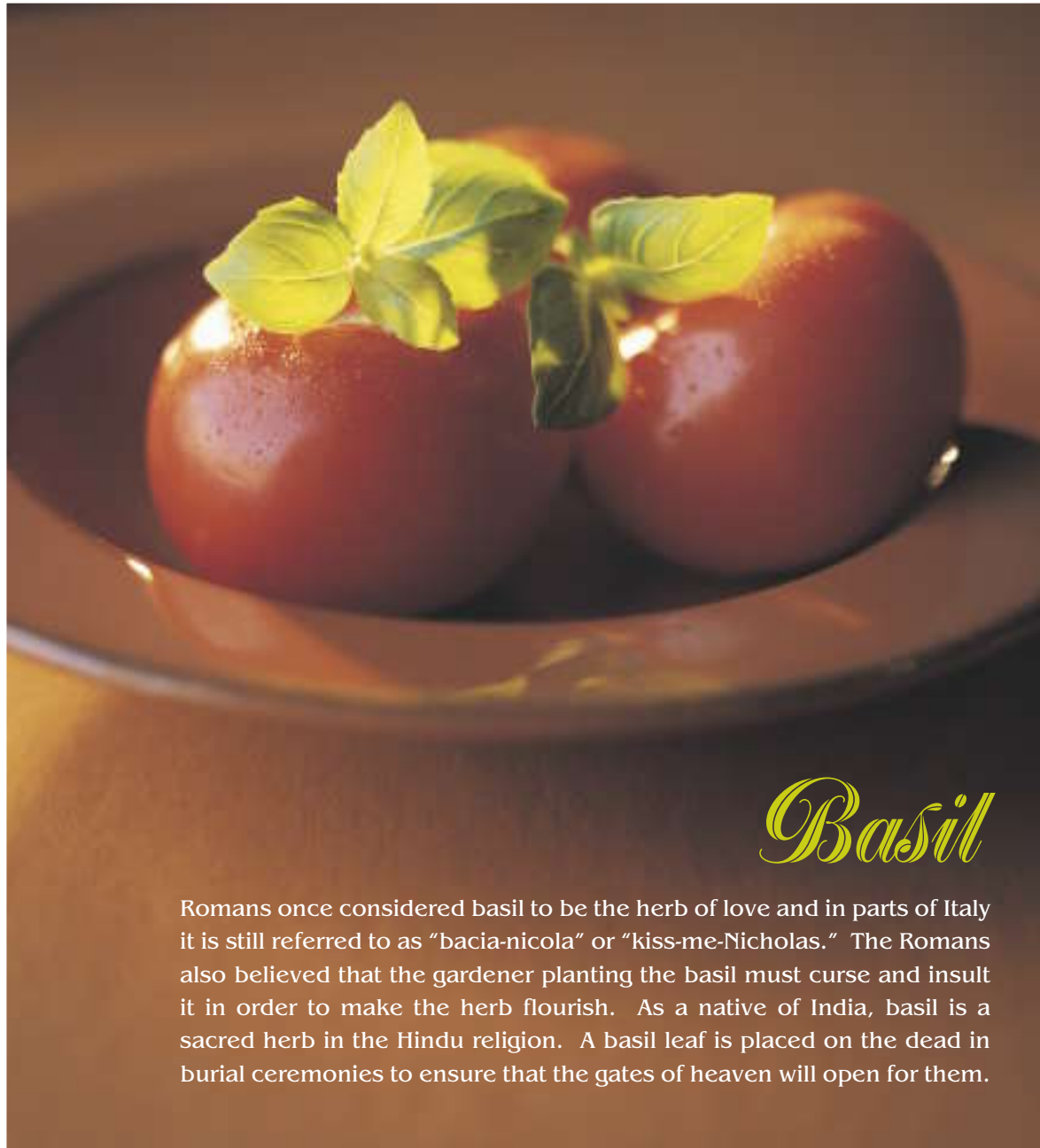


F L O R I D A

Herbs



There are many wonderful Florida grown herbs to enjoy all year round. Learning how to incorporate them into your cooking will not only enhance the flavor of your meals but may also spark new creative uses. If your recipe calls for dried herbs try substituting fresh herbs for improved taste. Use three times the amount of fresh herbs as you would dried. The following information gives you descriptions, history, culinary ideas, other popular uses and storing tips for the herbs Florida farmers grow.



Basil

Romans once considered basil to be the herb of love and in parts of Italy it is still referred to as “bacia-nicola” or “kiss-me-Nicholas.” The Romans also believed that the gardener planting the basil must curse and insult it in order to make the herb flourish. As a native of India, basil is a sacred herb in the Hindu religion. A basil leaf is placed on the dead in burial ceremonies to ensure that the gates of heaven will open for them.

Description

As one of the most popular herbs, basil is widely used throughout the world. While there are many different types of basil, sweet basil is the most common. Sweet basil plants have large, oval, bright green leaves with small white flower clusters. The aroma is a complex mix of sweet and spicy with a strong and fresh clove-like scent. Much like its aroma, sweet basil’s flavor is warm and peppery, with a hint of clove and undertones of mint and anise.

Culinary Uses

Basil tastes great in tomato and pasta dishes but it also gives a sweet-scented, minty aroma when crumbled over baked chicken, lamb or seafood. When making pesto or its French cousin pistou, sweet basil will yield the best results. Basil turns black when cooked in an acid medium like tomato sauce. Adding basil towards the end of cooking will serve to retain its aroma and flavor. It blends well with garlic, thyme and oregano.

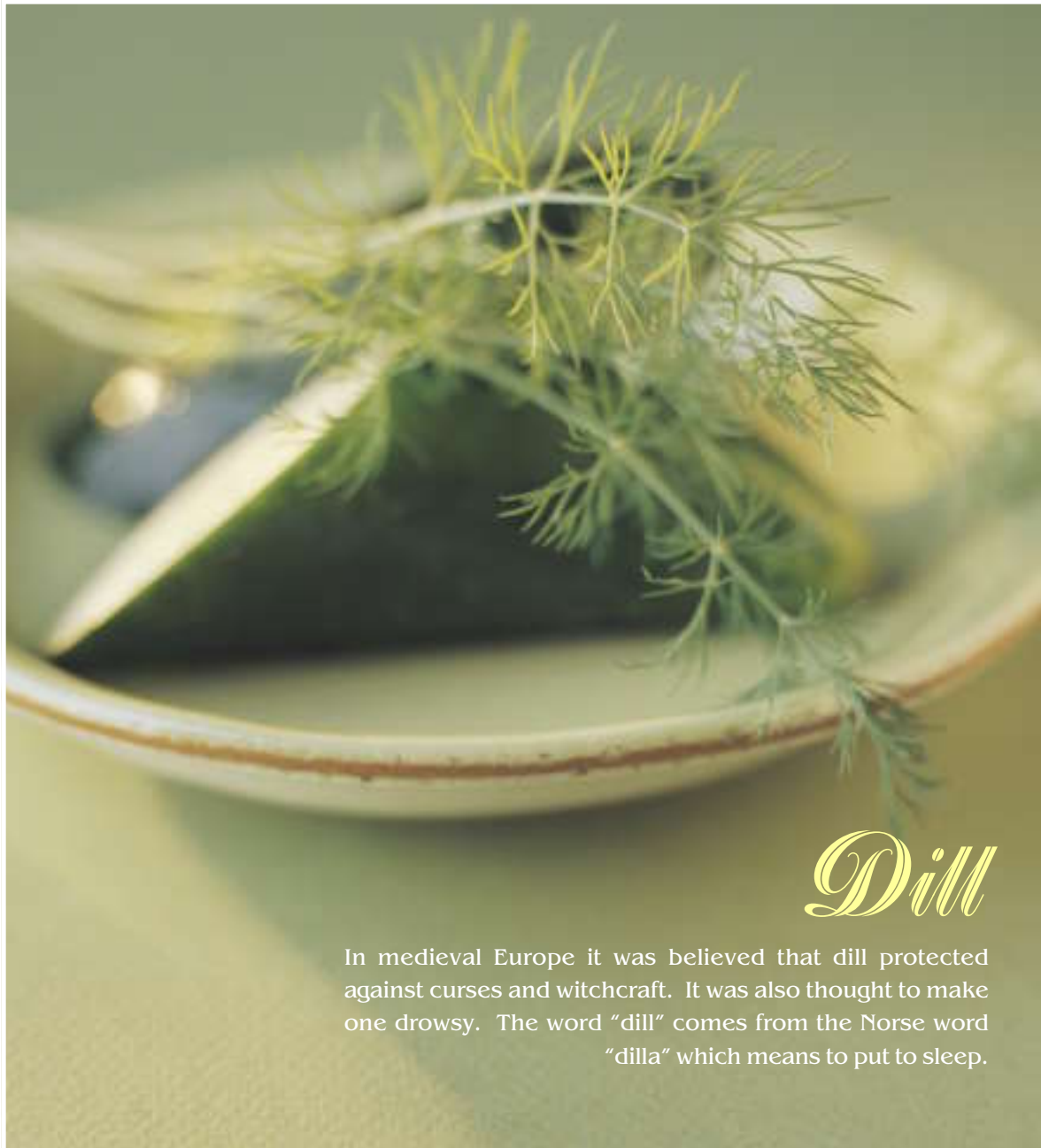
Basil leaves can be torn, chopped or shredded; however, cutting will bruise the leaf and cause it to darken quickly.

Other Uses

Some people believe putting whole basil plants on a window sill will deter flies. Basil is also used in aroma-therapy products, as a landscape plant, and it is even dried and pressed as a part of homemade paper.

Storing

Fresh basil, kept loosely wrapped in a plastic bag, will last about one week in the refrigerator, provided the leaves are not wet.



Dill

In medieval Europe it was believed that dill protected against curses and witchcraft. It was also thought to make one drowsy. The word "dill" comes from the Norse word "dilla" which means to put to sleep.

Description

Known for its feathery leaves and clean, fragrant lemon and anise aroma, dill is used as much as a garnish as it is a seasoning. Fresh leaves have the taste of anise and parsley.

Culinary Uses

Fresh dill pairs well with seafood, creamy sauces and vegetables such as beets, carrots, cucumbers, and potatoes. Many Scandinavian, Russian, German and Greek recipes call for dill. Wait until the end of cooking to add fresh dill, because it loses flavor when overheated. When using dill leaves, it is best to use fresh rather than dried to get the most flavor. Add finely chopped dill to potato salad, soups or rice for a fresh unique flavor. Mix dill, sour cream and horseradish for a great sauce for beef. Fresh dill combines well with basil, garlic, capers, horseradish, mustard, paprika and parsley.

Other Uses

According to some naturalists, the dill seeds contain a volatile oil that has a relaxant effect on muscles, especially those of the digestive tract, and has been used for centuries to cure such problems. Teas made with dill seed relieve indigestion and nausea, and produce a lulling effect.

Storing

Wrapped loosely in a plastic bag, dill will keep in the refrigerator for one week as long as the leaves are not wet. Dried dill will keep for up to 3 months if stored in a sealed container in a cool, dark place.

Description

Also called fresh coriander or Chinese parsley, cilantro is well known for its refreshing lemony-ginger aroma with hints of sage. Cilantro has long been considered an acquired taste because of its penetrating odor and flavor. The bright green leaves are fan shaped with jagged edges. In addition to the leaves, the seed, known as coriander, is also used in cooking.

Culinary Uses

Best known for its addition to Mexican and Asian foods, cilantro has many applications across the epicurean spectrum. It is essential to Mexican salsas, Chinese dim sum, Indian curries and Thai cuisine. Mexicans combine cilantro, garlic, chilies and lime juice to create a marinade for fish, chicken and vegetables. It also pairs well with avocado, coconut milk, corn, cucumbers, seafood, legumes, lemons, and rice. Try using cilantro with the following herbs and spices: garlic, basil, chili, chives, dill, ginger, lemon grass, mint and parsley.

Like basil, cilantro also turns black when cooked in an acid medium such as tomato sauce. It is used whole, shredded, chopped or minced in cooking. Cilantro bruises easy so handle with care. Because cilantro's leaves are so delicate it does not dry well and is best used fresh.

Other Uses

Cilantro is used in potpourri for its strong scent. Some believe cilantro and its seed coriander made into a tonic will help digestion. Cilantro is also a good source of Vitamin A.

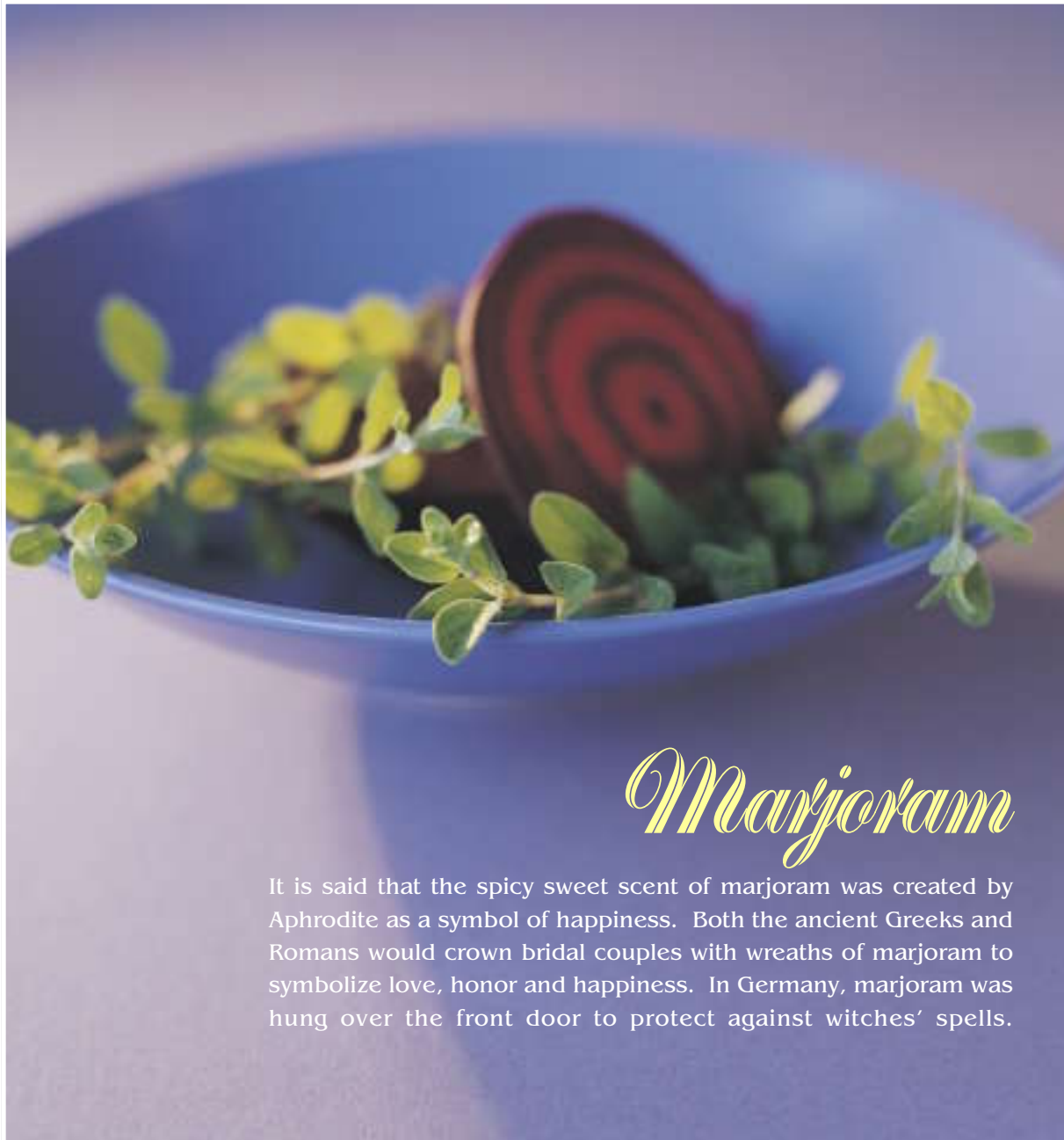
Storing

Wrapped loosely in plastic, cilantro will keep in the refrigerator for one week as long as the leaves are not wet. Rinse cilantro well before using as it may have soil or grit clinging to its leaves and stems.



Cilantro

The Chinese believed that cilantro/coriander could grant immortality. Coriander is one of the herbs thought to have aphrodisiac qualities. Cilantro was also known to be used as an "appetite" stimulant.



Marjoram

It is said that the spicy sweet scent of marjoram was created by Aphrodite as a symbol of happiness. Both the ancient Greeks and Romans would crown bridal couples with wreaths of marjoram to symbolize love, honor and happiness. In Germany, marjoram was hung over the front door to protect against witches' spells.

Description

Marjoram has gray-green leaves and clusters of white flowers. There has been some confusion in the past as to the difference between oregano and marjoram. All marjorams are oreganos, since the genus name for both is *origanum*, but not all oreganos are marjorams. Now oregano is the genus and marjoram, or sweet marjoram (*Origanum majorana*) is only one variety of over fifty types of oregano. Marjoram has a slightly minty, citrus taste with a hint of spice.

Culinary Uses

Marjoram leaves are best fresh because of their mild flavor. The delicate flavor of marjoram may be lost if it is added too early in the cooking process, therefore add at the very end of cooking. It goes well in salads, dressings, eggs, and mushroom sauces. Marjoram is suitable for thick vegetable soups, pasta, fish, game, beef, chicken, sausages and meat loaf. The flavor also works well with cheese, tomato, beet or bean dishes. Marjoram is most often used in recipes of French or English origin.

Create a tasty grilled chicken rub with garlic, salt, coarse black pepper and marjoram.

Other Uses

Marjoram and oregano are used as a steam inhalant to clear the sinuses and relieve laryngitis. European singers have been known to preserve their voices with marjoram tea sweetened with honey.

Storing

Fresh marjoram tightly sealed in a plastic bag will keep in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

Description

Rosemary's beautiful dense evergreen foliage is native to the Mediterranean coasts. In late spring through summer, rosemary has white, pink or pale blue flowers. Its strong aroma is warm and peppery with notes of pine and camphor. The taste is reminiscent of nutmeg and camphor with a woody, balsamic aftertaste.

Culinary Uses

Lamb, pork, veal and chicken are wonderful when paired with rosemary. Add rosemary with butter, salt and pepper to flavor baked potatoes. Create herb butter with rosemary to top vegetables. Toss it into fresh salads or to flavor olive oil. Rosemary is also good with cabbage, eggplant, lentils, mushrooms, onions, oranges, rabbit, tomatoes and winter squashes.

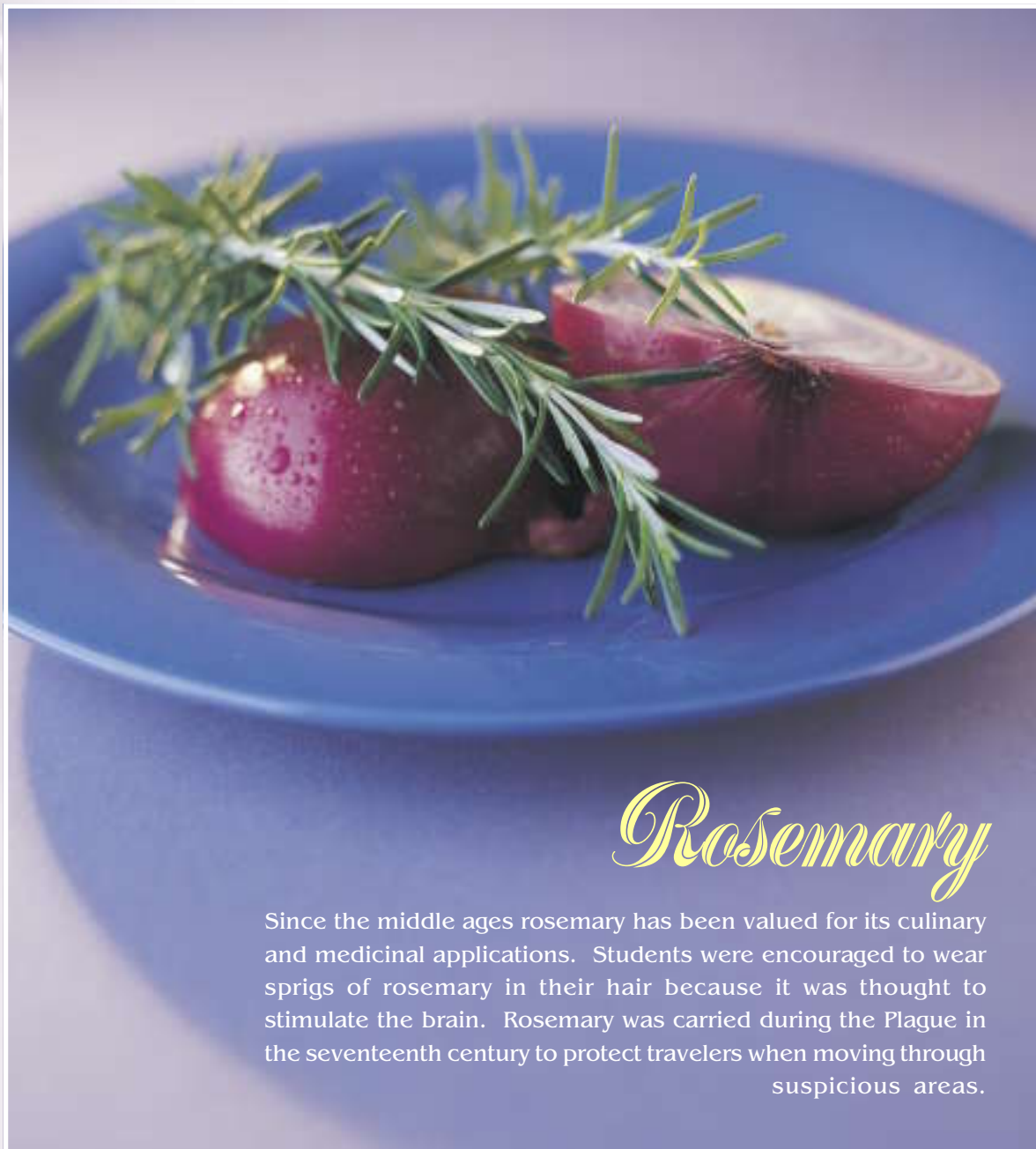
Rosemary is used whole, chopped and ground. Unlike many other herbs, rosemary's strong flavor is not diminished with cooking so use with care.

Other Uses

Linens can be spread over rosemary to dry in the sun to soak up the herb's wonderful scent. It also makes a lovely addition to potpourri.

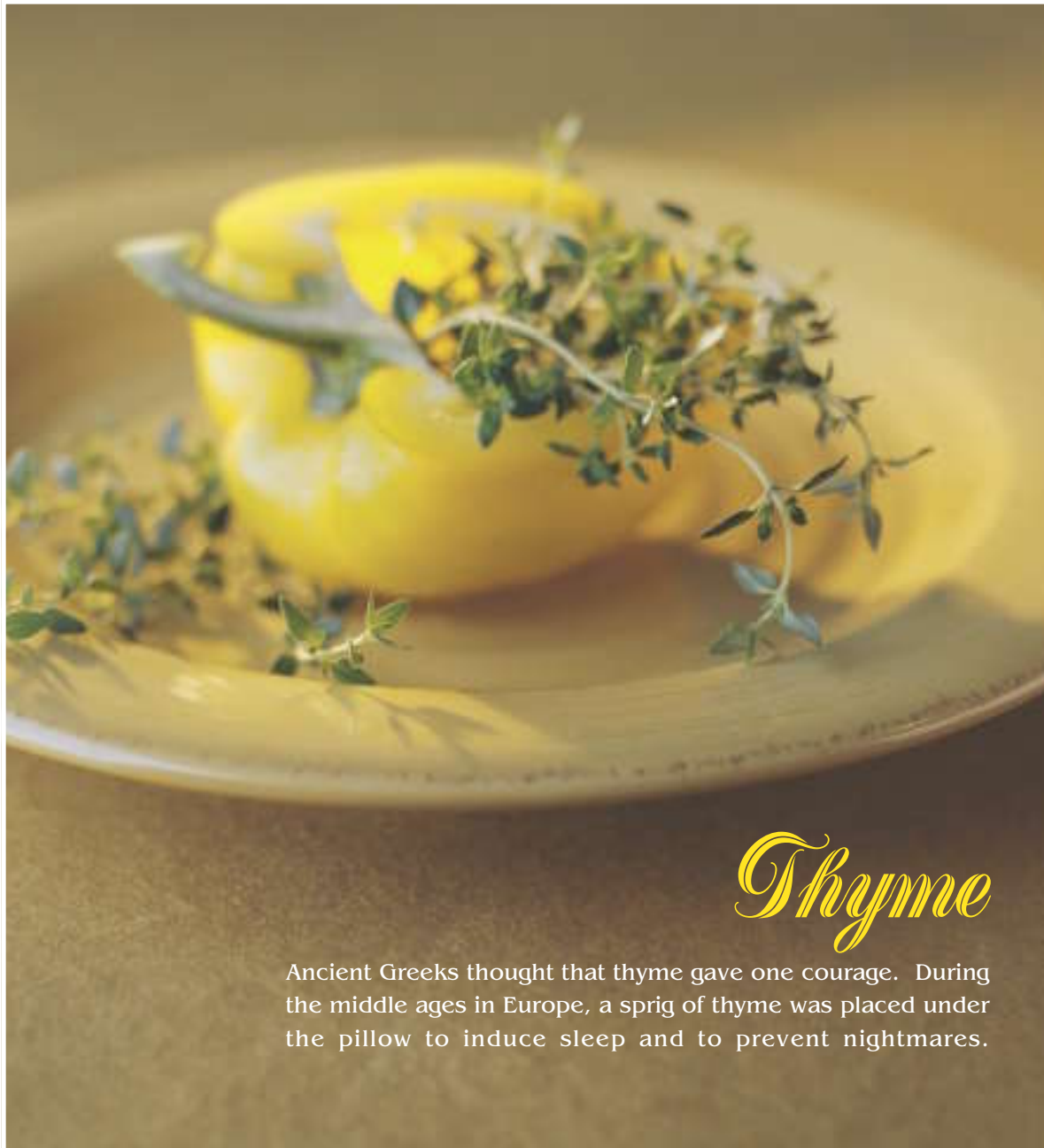
Storing

Fresh rosemary will keep for about two weeks in the refrigerator when leaves are dry and tightly sealed in a plastic bag.



Rosemary

Since the middle ages rosemary has been valued for its culinary and medicinal applications. Students were encouraged to wear sprigs of rosemary in their hair because it was thought to stimulate the brain. Rosemary was carried during the Plague in the seventeenth century to protect travelers when moving through suspicious areas.



Thyme

Ancient Greeks thought that thyme gave one courage. During the middle ages in Europe, a sprig of thyme was placed under the pillow to induce sleep and to prevent nightmares.

Description

Thyme, a low-growing evergreen with small bunches of leaves, is native to the Mediterranean where it grows wild between the cracks in rocks. This highly aromatic herb has a spicy taste with hints of cloves and mint. There are hundreds of varieties of thyme with flavors ranging from lemon to lavender.

Culinary Uses

Thyme's flavor and fragrance is not adversely affected by long, slow cooking and works well in soups, stews and casseroles. Add it in limited quantities to stocks, marinades, stuffings, sauces and soups. Combine white wine with thyme and slow cook chicken, rabbit and shellfish for a flavorful dish. Bread is also complimented by this versatile herb.

Fresh thyme sprigs and leaves are used whole or minced. Like many other herbs it turns black when cooked in an acid based recipe such as tomato sauce.

Other Uses

Whole thyme plants are grown for low hedging and as a fragrant creeping ground cover.

Storing

Thyme will keep in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks if it is dry and in a plastic bag.

Description

Tarragon may be mistaken for a weed except for its licorice fragrance. Its long, smooth, thin, blade-like green leaves have a strong flavor with spicy anise and basil notes.

Culinary Uses

Used sparingly, it adds a wonderful warm, deep flavor to many dishes. Tarragon is an essential ingredient in French cooking with fish, poultry, and egg dishes. It also lends itself well to marinades, vinegars, mustards and butters. Tarragon is essential to béarnaise and tartar sauces and combines well with vegetables such as potatoes, tomatoes, yellow squash, and zucchini. Try putting whole stems under fish, chicken or rabbit during cooking for a flavor infusion. Contrary to many other herbs tarragon loses its flavor when dried so it is best to use fresh herbs in cooking.

Tarragon is used whole, chopped, and minced in cooking. Long cooking diminishes the aroma but the flavor will not be lost.

Other Uses

Tarragon leaves are rich in iodine, mineral salts and vitamins A and C. In the past tarragon was used to prevent scurvy. It is also used as an appetite stimulant and digestive tonic by naturalists.

Storing

Tightly sealed dry in a plastic bag, tarragon will keep in the refrigerator for 2 weeks.



Tarragon

Tarragon was used by the Greeks as early as 500 BC. The Arabs named it "turkhum" which means dragon probably because they found the taste to be exceptionally strong or because of its serpentine shaped roots. The tradition has been continued by the French who call it "estragon."



Sage

It was believed that sage stimulated the brain, therefore, increasing powers of concentration, memory and reasoning. From this, the word “sage” took on another meaning – wise person. Sage was rubbed on the teeth to make them whiter in nineteenth-century America.

Description

Sage is a shrubby plant with long oval-shaped velvety leaves in colors ranging from a pale gray-green to dark purple-green. Blue, purple or white flower spikes appear in mid to late summer. The taste is sharp and spicy-bitter with a scent that combines thyme, lemon, pine and moss.

Culinary Uses

In America, sage is the main flavoring for breakfast sausage and traditional turkey stuffing. In England, sage is most associated with pork, goose and duck. Italians use sage to flavor polenta and pasta. Try gently heating a few sage leaves in butter for a tasty pasta sauce. Fresh sage is used whole and minced in cooking. Because it has such a strong flavor, only one sage leaf is necessary for most dishes. Sage is also good with apples, celery, dried beans, cheese, onions and tomatoes.

Use sage sparingly as too much will create an unpleasant musty taste. Unlike most other herbs, the flavor of the sage leaves intensifies as they dry.

Other Uses

Naturalists believe sage aids digestion and due to its antioxidant properties, acts as a preservative.

Storing

Fresh sage will keep for 2 weeks in the refrigerator when dry leaves are loosely packed in plastic.

Description

Native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean, there are hundreds of different types of mint. Chocolate, black peppermint, apple and basil are just a few of the many multiple varieties. Mint has a lovely, fresh fragrance with hints of lemon, peppermint, and vanilla. Its taste is sharp, sweet and warm with a cooling aftertaste. Characterized by its beautiful textured green leaves and reddish stems, mint serves as a nice ground cover for the garden.

Culinary Uses

Lamb, chicken, veal and pork go well with mint marinades, jellies, or salsas. Use mint to compliment tea, sauces, vinegar and syrups. In India, mint is used to counter the hot spices in vegetable and meat dishes. In South America, mint is combined with chili peppers, parsley and oregano as a flavoring for slow cooked dishes. Fruit salads, avocado salsas, fruit punches, deserts, chocolate and many drinks are improved with the addition of mint.

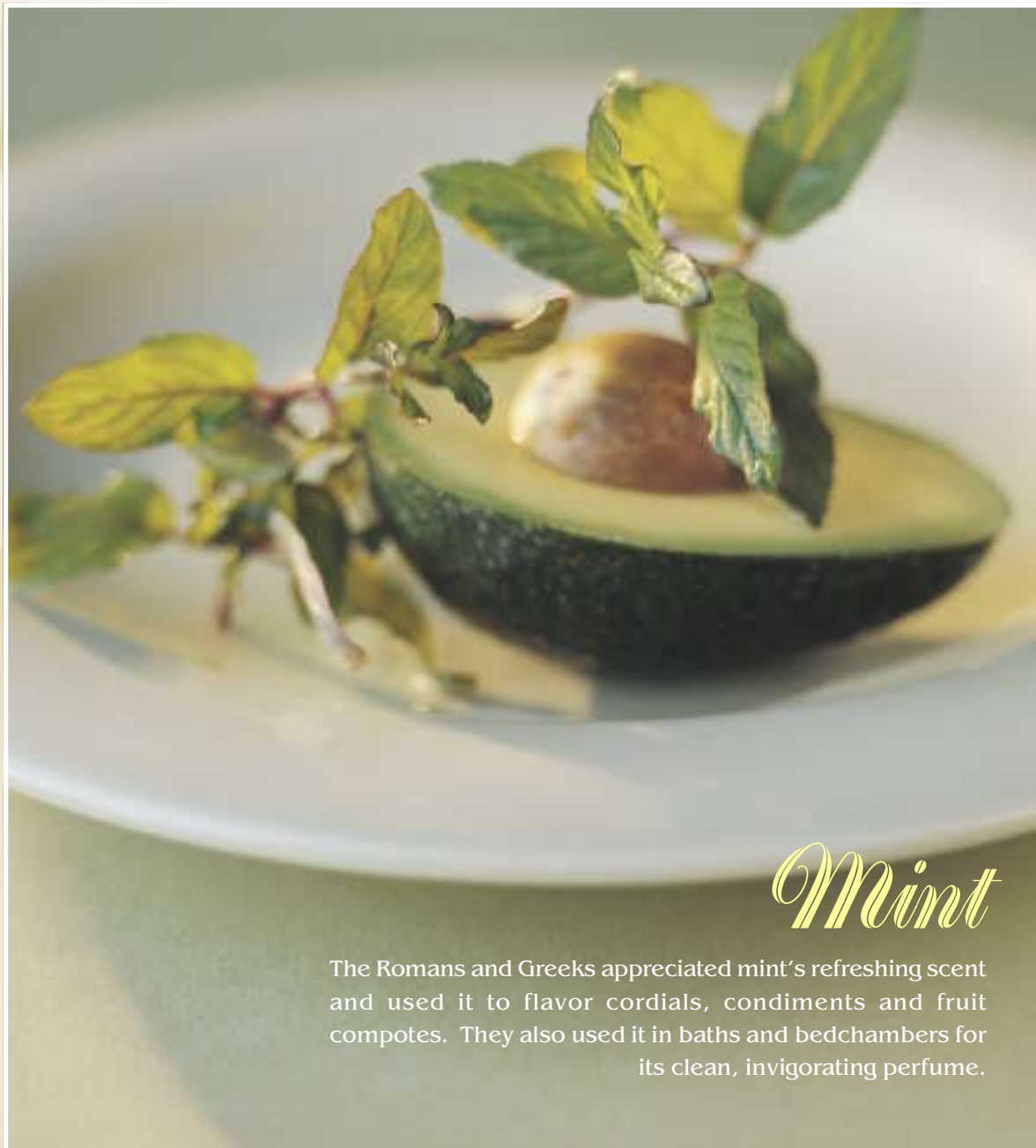
Mint combines well with basil, cardamom, cloves, dill, ginger, marjoram, oregano, pepper and thyme. The flavor diminishes quickly when exposed to heat. Fresh mint can be used whole, chopped or minced and turns black when cooked with high acidic foods.

Other Uses

Mint's essential oils are used in perfume, cosmetics, air fresheners, drink flavorings, candies and medications.

Storing

Bunches of mint stored in a glass of water will keep fresh for 2 – 7 days. Mint can also be stored in the refrigerator, dry, wrapped in a plastic bag for a week.



Mint

The Romans and Greeks appreciated mint's refreshing scent and used it to flavor cordials, condiments and fruit compotes. They also used it in baths and bedchambers for its clean, invigorating perfume.



Oregano

Although oregano is heavily associated with Italian cuisine it is likely that it originated in Greece. The word oregano comes from the Greek, meaning “joy of the mountain.” Ancient Greeks believed that cows that grazed on fields of oregano produced tastier meat. According to Aristotle, tortoises who swallowed a snake would immediately eat oregano to prevent death. Oregano is also believed to calm nerves and is used to cure sea sickness.

Description

This low bushy perennial of the mint family is native to the Mediterranean and has a warm sharp taste with lemon and pepper undertones. Oregano leaves are dark green with delicate hair-like texture underneath. Flowers range in color from pink to purple in the late summer and early fall.

Culinary Uses

Oregano has become an essential ingredient in many Italian dishes including pizza, pastas, and roasted vegetables. Oregano paired with basil are the basis for many Italian seasonings. It is also widely used in Greek and Mexican cooking. As the main herb flavoring in chili powder, oregano holds up well in a mix with other flavors. The Greeks enjoy oregano in baked fish and it is the main flavoring in Greek salad. Try adding sprigs of oregano on the coals of a grill for a flavor infusion to whatever you are cooking on top. Oregano's rich flavor also deepens and melds flavors of soups and sauces without overwhelming the dish. Oregano can be used either fresh or dried. When using the fresh herb, use twice the amount as dried.

Other Uses

Infuse bathwater with oregano for a relaxing soak. Oregano is also used in potpourri and pillows.

Storing

Fresh oregano tightly sealed in a plastic bag will keep in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.



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