

The image shows several dried herb stems with feathery, finely divided leaves, likely fennel or dill, arranged vertically against a light, textured background. The stems are light brown and the leaves are a darker, muted green-brown color. The overall appearance is that of a pressed and dried botanical specimen.

Food Writers New Zealand  
**HANDBOOK**  
herbs, flowers and seeds

# CULINARY HERBS

The main culinary herbs, their availability and general use

Common name (botanical name)	Most plentiful	Culinary use/part used
<b>Angelica</b> <i>(Angelica archangelica)</i> Do not confuse with the shiny dark green leaves of <i>A. pachycarpa</i> which is inedible and used only for garnish.	spring–summer	Stems candied in desserts, fruit salads; or fresh; cooked with tart fruit to reduce sweetening needed
<b>Basil</b> Many cultivars available, e.g. sweet basil, dark opal, fino verde, lemon, lime, Thai	summer	Leaves in tomato, eggplant, capsicum and potato dishes, with pizza, in pesto, and egg and cheese mixtures. Ingredient in herbs de Provence.
<b>Bay leaf</b>	all year	Leaves fresh or dried in marinades, braises, soups, stews, pickled vegetables, sauces, milk puddings, dried beans, peas and lentils. Ingredient of bouquet garni and garam masala
<b>Borage</b>	spring–autumn	Young leaves sparingly in salads, dressings, sauces. Use edible flowers for garnish on salads, soups, desserts, drinks
<b>Chervil</b>	spring–autumn	Leaves in salads, egg dishes, sauces, herb butters, chicken and fish. Best used fresh or added at end of cooking. Ingredient of fines herbes
<b>Chives</b>	all year	Leaves in salads, egg dishes, soft cheeses. Ingredient of fines herbes. Add at end of cooking
<b>Coriander</b> Leaf also called cilantro, Chinese parsley	all year	Leaves in Asian, Indian, Mexican and Thai dishes
<b>Cress</b> 'Mustard and cress' ( <i>Lepidium sativum</i> )	spring–summer	Young leaves in salads, sandwiches, garnishes
<b>Land cress</b> <i>(Barbarea verna)</i>	spring–summer	Young leaves in salads, sandwiches, garnishes
<b>Watercress</b> <i>(Nasturtium officinale)</i>	all year	Fresh leaves used in soups, salads, sandwiches, garnishes, stir-fries
<b>Curry leaves</b>	all year	Fresh or dried leaves in Indian-style curries. The flavour and fragrance of fresh leaves is stronger than dried leaves. Store fresh leaves wrapped in plastic in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. Store dried leaves in a dark, air-tight container
<b>Dandelion</b>	spring–summer	Leaves in salads, stir-fries
<b>Dill</b>	spring–autumn	Leaves with seafood especially salmon, in salads, with cucumber, potatoes, sauces, pickling and borscht

Common name (botanical name)	Most plentiful	Culinary use/part used
<b>Kaffir lime leaf</b>	spring–autumn	A hallmark of South East Asian cuisine. In curries, marinades and cook with rice. Ingredient in Asian bouquet garni with lemongrass and ginger. Juice of the ripe fruit (lime) is used in the same fashion. Can be frozen
<b>Lemon balm</b>	spring–autumn	Best not cooked. Add at end of cooking. Fresh leaves in vinegar, wine cups, fish dishes, soft cheese dishes, chicken dishes, salsa, sautéed vegetables
<b>Lemon grass</b>	spring–autumn	Slightly swollen, white leaf-stalk. Crush to add to marinades, chop for Thai curry pastes, finely slice for soups and stir-fries, infuse as a tea.
<b>Lemon verbena</b>	summer–autumn	Fresh or dried leaves in fish or poultry dishes, in stuffings, sorbets, ice cream, herb teas
<b>Lovage</b>	spring–autumn	Strongly flavoured leaves sparingly in soups, stews, braises, stocks, with chicken, cheese, tomatoes
<b>Marjoram</b>	spring–autumn	Leaves in soups, especially onion, with cheese, eggs, meats and vegetables. Used in Italian dishes. Ingredient in herbs de Provence
<b>Mint</b> <i>Many cultivars, e.g. spearmint, apple mint, peppermint, chocolate mint</i>	all year	Fresh leaves in mint sauce with roast or grilled lamb, with fish and a staple in Asian cuisines, dried in Middle Eastern soups and stews, with peas, potatoes, cucumber, salads, yoghurt, tabbouleh, chocolate desserts, fruit cups, mint julep and mojitos. Leaves turn black if chopped and added to hot food. Best in cold preparations. Ingredient in herbs de Provence
<b>Mitsuba</b> <i>Japanese parsley</i>	all year	Seedlings or thinings in salads, leaves and stems in clear soups, savoury Japanese-style dishes. Add just before serving to retain flavour
<b>Nasturtium</b>	spring–autumn	Young leaves shredded in salads, flowers as an edible garnish. Using unripe seeds for pickling is no longer recommended
<b>Oregano</b>	summer–autumn	Leaves in stuffings, sausage dishes, with grilled meats, fried vegetables, tomato sauces, pizzas, spaghetti, marinades, pickled olives and capers. Used in Italian dishes. Ingredient in herbs de Provence
<b>Parsley</b> <i>Curly parsley, Italian or flat-leaf parsley</i>	spring–autumn	Leaves and stalks in soups, stews, braises, tabbouleh, persillade, gremolata and salsa. Leaves for garnishing. Ingredient in bouquet garni and fines herbes
<b>Perilla</b> <i>Red perilla, green perilla. Also known as beefsteak plant, shiso (Japanese), tai to (Vietnamese). Looks like frilly-leafed basil</i>	summer	Perilla has a spicy flavour. Tiny seedlings finely chopped, or leaves or flowering shoots to garnish raw and cooked fish dishes, salads, cucumber, tempura, sushi, pickles
<b>Rocket</b> <i>Also known as arugula</i>	all year	Leaves and flowers in salads, sandwiches or as a garnish

Common name (botanical name)	Most plentiful	Culinary use/part used
Rosemary	all year	Finely chopped leaves with roast sheep meats, marinades, eggplant, beans, potatoes, barbecue foods, bread. Use stems as skewers. Ingredient in herbs de Provence
Common sage Purple sage Variegated sage	spring–autumn	Leaves in sausages, stuffing, with onions, leeks, cheese and port. Ingredient in herbs de Provence. Pan-fry and serve with bacon
Salad burnet	spring–summer	Fresh, young leaves in salads, soups, soft cheese, fruit drinks or as a garnish
Summer savory Winter savory	spring–autumn all year	Called the 'bean herb'. Summer savory has a softer texture and more subtle flavour than winter savory. Leaves in bean dishes, summer savory in salads, both with onions, courgettes, fish and meat
Scented geranium <i>Lemon, orange, rose, spice scented geraniums</i>	all year	Leaves placed under cakes when baking, in sorbets, infuse leaves in cream, wine, syrup, jams and jellies
Sorrel <i>Garden or common sorrel has long arrow-shaped leaves. Buckler-leaved sorrel (French sorrel) is milder and has smaller shield-shaped leaves</i>	spring–summer	Use sparingly as it is high in oxalic acid. Young tender leaves (discard stalks) in salads, and larger leaves in soups, braises, stews and sauces, goat cheese, eggs and poultry
Sweet cicely	spring–autumn	Finely chopped young leaves in salads, dressings, soups. Acts as a sweetener to reduce sugar required to sweeten tart fruit
French tarragon	spring – autumn	Leaves with eggs, chicken, fish, mushrooms, vegetables, tomatoes, oranges, sauces, vinegars. Ingredient in <i>fines herbes</i> .
Russian tarragon	spring – autumn	More robust with a coarse texture and inferior flavour than French tarragon.
Thyme <i>Many cultivars e.g. common thyme, lemon thyme</i>	all year	Leaves and stems in braises, stews, soups, marinades, pate, grilled vegetables, stuffings, beans. Ingredient of <i>bouquet garni</i> and <i>herbs de Provence</i> . Anything but common!
Vietnamese mint <i>Also called rau ram, laksa leaf, Cambodian mint, hot mint, Vietnamese cilantro, pak pai</i>	spring – autumn	Use leaves in small amounts in Asian chicken and fish dishes, soups and stews, salads and spring rolls.
Bouquet garni		Bay leaf, thyme and parsley tied together. Use in stews, soups, braises.
Fines herbes		Equal parts of finely chopped fresh chervil, chives, parsley and tarragon. Use in salads, egg dishes.
Herbs de Provence		A mixture of dried herbs – rosemary, sage, thyme, marjoram, basil, oregano, mint. Use on onion tart, pizza and meat dishes.

*Herb cookery: Add 'hard' herbs such as bay, rosemary or thyme at the beginning of cooking and 'soft' herbs such as chives, parsley and coriander, at the end of cooking.*

# EDIBLE FLOWERS

It is important that all the flowers and herbs you serve are pesticide free, non-toxic and preferably organically grown. Check a good garden reference book or a reliable website for information on any plants that are questionable. Some varieties of the same species may or may not be edible so therefore it is best to reference them by their botanical name. Discard any flowers that taste really bitter. People with allergies should consume flowers with caution.

If using whole flowers, carefully trim any green leaves, stems and/or the base of petals as these may be bitter. This ensures everything on the plate is edible.

## Common edible flowers

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Apple/crab apple (*Malus domestica*, *Malus x robusta*, *Malus x zumi*)

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Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)

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Citrus (*Citrus aurantium*, *Citrus limon*, *Citrus x latifolia*)

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Cornflowers (*Centuarea cyanus*)

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Day lilies (*Hemerocallis*) (petals only)

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Feijoa (*Feijoa sellowiana*)

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Hawthorne (*Crataegus monogyna*)

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Impatiens (*Impatiens walleriana*)

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Jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*)

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Lavender (*Lavandula augustifolia*)

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Lemon verbena (*Aloysia triphylla*)

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Nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus and minus*)

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Marigolds (*Tagetes patula*)

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Pansies (*Viola x wittrockiana*)

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Pinks/Dianthus (*Dianthus*)

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Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)

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Rose (*Rosa*)

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Scented geranium (*Pelargonium spp*)

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Viola (*Cornuta*, *hybrid*, *tricolour*, *williamsiana*)

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Violet (*Viola adorata*)

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Yucca flowers (*Filamentosa*)

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## Edible herb flowers

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Basil (use sparingly)

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Borage (*Borago officinalis* with discretion)

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Chamomile

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Coriander

---

Chives (petals only)

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Dill

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Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgae*)

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Mint

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Mustard

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Oregano

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Pineapple sage

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Rocket

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Rosemary

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Sage (with discretion)

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Summer savory

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**Edible vegetable flowers**

Courgettes

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Pea (*Pisum species*)

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Pumpkins

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Runner beans (only *Phaseolus coccineus*)

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**Poisonous and non-edible flowers  
never use in food or beverages**

Daffodil

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Delphinium

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Foxglove

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French or non-English lavenders

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Hellebore (winter rose)

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Daphne

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Jonquil

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Larkspur

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Lily of the valley

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Oleander

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Rhododendron

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Wisteria

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# AROMATIC SEEDS

Common name	Culinary use
Anise	In spice breads, biscuits, cakes, sweets, with fruits such as figs and raisins, with beef and pork in braises and stews, with carrots and cabbage.
Caraway	In rye and other breads, cakes, various cheeses, with beef and beetroot, cabbage, courgettes and potatoes
Cardamom	In curries, rice, pulse dishes, Indian sweet dishes and beverages, pickles, punches, mulled wines, meat, poultry, shellfish. Whole pods used in Indian meals
Celery	In cucumber and other pickles, and where a strong celery flavour is needed. Used medicinally as a diuretic
Coriander	In cakes, sweets, stewed fruit and fruit puddings, and in marmalade. Also in chicken and pork dishes, in curry pastes, powders and garam masala
Cumin	Usually part of spicy rather than sweet dishes. Cooked in oil with turmeric before other ingredients added
Dill	In bread, pickles, vinegars and sauces for fish. Dill seeds taste and look like caraway
Fennel	Tastes similar to anise, used in breads, cakes, fruit tarts and vegetables. Chewed as a breath freshener and aids digestion
Fenugreek	Main ingredient in curry powder, used as a sprout, a medicinal herb

Our first handbook was produced in 1991, with the purpose of providing a reference tool that in turn would establish standards for New Zealand food writers. In 1999 the handbook was updated to reflect the growing needs of members.

Food Writers New Zealand is indebted to our hardworking, talented, innovative and active contributors who provided their specialist input for this latest edition.

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**KATHY PATERSON, PRESIDENT, 2016**

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