People worldwide are becoming more adventurous when cooking with fresh herbs. If you are just starting to use fresh herbs in your cooking or need a refresher, these tips for washing, storing, and cooking with herbs will lead you in the right direction.

**The History of Herbs**

The use of herbs in cooking dates back thousands of years. During that time, it was thought that herbs and spices had properties that were beneficial to human health, but it wasn't until recent years that scientists established just how good herbs are for one's health.

Early settlers brought herbs to the new world to use as remedies for illnesses, to store with linens, and to mask the bland flavors or spoiling of food. Colonists introduced each other to the herb gardening style known as "kitchen gardens," which involved growing herbs, along with vegetables and flowers, in gardens just outside the kitchen door for convenience and safety. To colonists, herbs were as important to their health, and the quality of their food, as were vegetables. The interest in herbs continued through the Revolutionary War to the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, who grew 26 kinds of herbs in his personal kitchen garden. As civilizations continued to grow, so did the understanding of how to utilize the abundant variety of fresh herbs in cooking.

Herbs are the leaves of temperate climate plants; temperate climates have summers and winters of similar length. Examples of herbs include basil, thyme, sage, rosemary, and oregano. Today, herbs are often used in cooking to enhance the flavor of foods without the addition of extra fat, sugar, or sodium.

**Buying Fresh Herbs**

It is best to buy herbs close to the time when you will use them to ensure their freshness. Also, if possible, buy herbs in small bundles or packages so you will be able to use them before they lose their peak flavor. If buying a small quantity is not an option, split the bundle with friends or family, plan your next week's meals around the herbs you bought, or dry what isn't unused!

Look for herbs that are rich in color and aroma. They should smell fresh and crisp, not musty, and shouldn't be wilted or discolored. If you are unsure of their quality, remove a few of the stems from the bunch. If the stems alone can support the leaves, the herbs are fresh. If the stems wilt, it would be best to pick a different bunch.

Fresh herbs are available at local supermarkets and farmers markets. Stock may be limited in small grocery stores. Herbs come packaged in loose plastic bags, tied in bunches, or in plastic containers. At the supermarket, fresh herbs can be found in or near the fresh vegetable section.

**Washing Fresh Herbs**

It is important to wash herbs before cooking or storing them to remove dirt or grit. Rinse small portions under cool, running water. Once all the...
The following dried-herb blends are great to try with any dish. Remember to adjust the amount when using fresh herbs.

**Salt-Free Blend**  
makes about 1/3 cup  
1 T. mustard powder  
2 t. parsley  
2 t. onion powder  
2 t. thyme  
1 T. garlic powder  
2 t. dill weed  
2 t. savory  
2 t. paprika  
2 t. lemon peel

**Garden Blend**  
makes about 1 1/4 cup  
3 T. dried parsley  
3 T. dried basil  
3 T. dried thyme  
3 T. dried marjoram  
3 T. dried rosemary  
3 T. dried chives  
3 T. paprika  
1/2 t. garlic powder

**Herbs de Provence**  
(used for marinating and grilling meats) — makes about 2 cups  
1/2 cup dried rosemary  
1/2 cup dried thyme  
1/4 cup dried marjoram  
1/4 cup dried oregano  
1/4 cup dried savory  
2 T. dried lavender leaves  
2 T. dried fennel seeds or stalks

**Italian Seasoning**  
makes about 1 1/2 cups  
1/2 cup dried oregano  
1/2 cup dried basil  
1/4 cup dried parsley  
1 T. fennel seeds, crushed  
2 T. dried sage  
1 T. hot red pepper flakes

**Fish Herbs**  
makes about 1/2 cup  
3 T. dried dill weed  
2 T. dried basil  
1 T. dried tarragon  
1 T. dried lemon thyme  
1 T. dried parsley  
1 T. dried chervil  
1 T. dried chives

**Poultry Herbs**  
makes about 1/3 cup  
2 T. dried tarragon  
1 T. dried marjoram  
1 T. dried basil  
1 T. dried rosemary  
1 t. paprika  
1 t. dried lovage

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1 t. dried lovage

Dirt has been washed away, gently shake the herbs or carefully spin dry them in a salad spinner. Remove excess water by lightly patting with a dry paper towel.

For larger herb bundles, fill a clean sink or a large, deep bowl with cool water. Place the herbs in the water and move them around to get rid of any dirt. Remove the herbs from the dirty water, drain, refill with clean water, and continue the washing processes. Follow the previous steps until your water is clear and no dirt is left behind. To dry, you can either gently shake the herbs or carefully spin dry them in a salad spinner. Again, remove any excess water by lightly patting with a dry paper towel.

**Storing Fresh Herbs**

The longer herbs are stored, the less appealing and flavorful they become. If you buy herbs a few days before you will use them, it is important to refrigerate the herbs properly to conserve their color and flavor.

Make sure any ties or rubber bands are removed from the herb bundles before storing. Throw away leaves that are discolored or limp. In order to extend the freshness of the herbs for about one week, cut the stems diagonally as if you were cutting flower stems. Place the newly-cut stems in a jar, vase, or tall glass with one to two inches of water. Cover the herbs with a plastic bag, leaving space for air to circulate. Another way to store herbs is to simply place them in an open or only partly-closed plastic bag or container. Whatever method you choose, be careful to avoid crushing your herbs. Also, store your herbs in the warmest part of your refrigerator to avoid the possibility of freezing.

If you don't plan on using the herbs within a week of purchase, it may be best to freeze them. You can follow these easy steps for freezing fresh herbs from the National Center for Home Food Preservation:

- Wash, drain, and pat dry with paper towels.

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- If you don't plan on using the herbs within a week of purchase, it may be best to freeze them. You can follow these easy steps for freezing fresh herbs from the National Center for Home Food Preservation:

- Wash, drain, and pat dry with paper towels.
Wrap a few sprigs or leaves in freezer wrap and place in a freezer bag.

Seal and freeze.

Another effective way to freeze herbs is to chop them, put them in ice cube trays, cover with water, and freeze. The ice around them seals out air and helps preserve their flavor and aroma. Thaw as many cubes as needed for your next dish.

Make sure to label the freezer bag with the name of the herb and the date. Fresh herbs tend to lose their color and become wilted during freezing, causing all herbs to look the same. Herbs that have been frozen are generally used in cooked meals rather than as a garnish because of their appearance.

Cooking with Fresh Herbs

Many people are hesitant when it comes to cooking with fresh herbs because they are unsure of which ones and how much to use, how to prepare the herbs, and when to add during the cooking process. However, using fresh herbs when you cook is a great way to minimize unhealthy food additives, especially salt, and add new flavors to your classic dishes.

There is no general rule about how much to use. Most recipes specify an amount in the list of ingredients. Keep in mind that it is okay to use more or less than the recipe calls for, but until you know how your taste buds will react to the flavor of the herbs, it is best to start with small amounts and add more if desired.

If you don't have a recipe to follow, start with 1/4 teaspoon and add more as needed to reach your ideal flavor. You don't want the herbs to overpower the other flavors in the dish. When doubling a recipe, do not double the herbs or spices. Increase their amounts by 1/2. If a recipe calls for dried herbs, you can substitute fresh herbs. Dried herbs are stronger than fresh herbs so you will need to use more of the fresh herbs. If the recipe calls for 1 teaspoon of dried, crushed herbs or 1/4 teaspoon of powdered herbs, use 3 teaspoons (1 tablespoon) of fresh.

Recipes generally tell us how to prepare our herbs. Examples include mince, dice, chop, or whole leaf. If no directions are given, it is common to mince or finely chop the herbs. Mincing causes more of the herb's flavor to be exposed. This can be done with a sharp knife or by using a pair of kitchen scissors to snip the herbs.

The timing of the addition of fresh herbs during recipe preparation depends on the herb being used and if the dish being prepared is hot or cold. For hot dishes, fresh herbs are added near the end of the cooking time or just before serving to retain their flavor and aroma. Delicate herbs such as basil, cilantro, and dill should be added during the last one to two minutes of cooking or right before the dish is served. Less delicate herbs including rosemary and thyme can be added during the last 20 minutes of cooking. For some cooking processes, the herbs are added toward the beginning. Most recipes indicate the best time to add herbs.

For cold dishes such as salads, dips, dressings, and various desserts, the herbs should be added several hours before serving or overnight.

Common Herb and Food Combinations

Each herb has its own unique flavor but can add zest to a variety of different foods. Below is a list of common herb and food combinations. Remember, this list is only a guideline—once you become familiar with these and other herbs, feel free to try your own combinations!

**Basil** — Tomato products (juice, pasta sauces, pizza sauce, etc.), eggs, game meats, lamb, veal, rice, spaghetti, vinaigrette, soups (minestrone, pea, potato, and vegetable), beans, eggplant

**Thyme** — Eggs, game meats, lamb, veal, rice, poultry, barbeque sauce, fish, oysters, chowders, soups (onion, tomato, and vegetable), mushrooms, tomatoes

**Rosemary** — Dumpings, eggs, game meats, lamb, veal, poultry, fish, barbeque sauce, chicken, beef, soups (pea and vegetable), beans, mushrooms, potatoes, cauliflower, turnips

**Oregano** — Tomato dishes, beef, game meats, veal, spaghetti, clams, soups (bean, minestrone, and tomato), beans, eggplant, and mushrooms

**Dill** — Tomato dishes, yeast breads, eggs, coleslaw, potato salad, fish, beans, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cucumber, summer squash

**Parsley** — Salads, vegetables, pastas

**Sage** — Cottage cheese, game meats, pork, rice, poultry, soups (chicken, minestrone, and vegetable), stuffing

**Cilantro** — Mexican and Asian cooking, rice, salsa, tomatoes

**Mint** — Desserts, lamb, peas, fruit salads, sauce
Recipes Using Herbs

Fresh herbs can be used in a variety of dishes to enhance the flavor without the addition of extra salt, sugar, or fat. Give the following recipes a try and see what you think!


**Vegetable Pasta with Tomatoes**

1 medium zucchini, washed and ends removed  
1 medium onion, peeled and chopped  
2 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped  
1 T. olive oil  
1 T. dried leaf basil, crushed  
½ t. coarsely ground black pepper  
2 cups prepared no-fat pasta sauce  
1 cup chopped fresh tomatoes  
8 ounces dried pasta, shape of choice  
1 T. chopped fresh parsley or basil  
Grated Parmesan cheese, optional

Cut zucchini in quarters lengthwise and cut into ½-inch pieces. Place zucchini, onion, garlic, and olive oil with seasonings in large, deep skillet and sauté; over MEDIUM heat until soft. Stir often. Add prepared sauce, mix well, and let simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in ½ cup chopped tomato and allow to heat thoroughly.

In a separate pot, cook pasta as directed on package. Drain well and place in large serving bowl. Add sauce and mix gently. Top with the reserved ½ cup chopped tomatoes and chopped herbs. Serve hot. (Serves 4)

**Green Beans and Potatoes**

1 pound red potatoes  
¼ cup olive oil  
1 T. chopped garlic  
1½ T. finely chopped rosemary  
1 t. grated lemon zest  
¼ t. red chili flakes  
1 pound green beans, trimmed and blanched  
2 t. lemon juice  
Salt

Simmer potatoes until tender; drain and cool. Quarter the potatoes lengthwise and set aside. In large sauté pan heat oil, add garlic and sauté for 30 seconds. Add rosemary, lemon zest, and chili flakes; sauté until fragrant. Add potatoes and beans; sauté until vegetables are hot and coated with seasonings. Sprinkle with lemon juice and season lightly with salt. Serve warm. (Serves 3)
**Cherry Stuffed Grilled Chicken**

1½ cups pitted and coarsely chopped fresh sweet cherries

¼ cup chopped onion

1 t. chopped fresh sage

½ t. each salt and chopped fresh thyme

4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (4 to 6 ounces each)

3 T. olive oil

2 T. white wine vinegar

1½ t. garlic salt

½ t. coarsely ground pepper

Combine cherries, onion, sage, salt and thyme; mix well. Cut a pocket on the thicker side of each chicken breast; sprinkle lightly with salt if desired. Stuff ¼ of the cherry mixture into each pocket; close opening with metal skewers or wooden picks. Combine oil, vinegar, garlic salt, and pepper; mix well. Marinate stuffed chicken breasts ½ hour in refrigerator. Broil or grill chicken breasts, brushing with marinade, until fully cooked and juices run clear when sliced.

* Oven Method: Brown the stuffed chicken in an oven-safe skillet on both sides. Bake at 375ºF 12 to 15 minutes or until juices run clear. (Serves 4)

* If fresh cherries are not available use frozen cherries; thaw in refrigerator the day before and drain excess liquid.

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**Roasted Squash and Eggplant Casserole with Chicken**

1 large yellow squash

1 medium eggplant

1½ T. olive oil

1 T. balsamic vinegar

1 fresh lemon, juiced

4 cloves garlic

1 t. fresh parsley

Black pepper, to taste

½ cup fresh basil, chopped

2 medium size chicken breasts, pre-cooked and cubed

1 cup canned tomato sauce

Preheat oven to 350ºF. Slice squash and eggplant lengthwise. In a bowl mix the oil, vinegar, lemon juice, garlic, parsley, black pepper. Brush squash and eggplant with this seasoning mixture. Grill vegetables for two to three minutes on each side, or roast them in the oven under the broiler. Arrange squash, eggplant, basil, and chicken in an 8” x 8” cooking dish and cover with tomato sauce. Bake 20 to 30 minutes, or until thoroughly heated. (Serves 4)
Program Announcements

These programs are free to the public, so please call us at 904-491-7340 or 904-879-1019 or e-mail rljordi@ufl.edu if you plan to attend. If response is too small, the program will be canceled.

Landscape Matters 10AM-11AM

Composting
Wednesday July 10
Master Gardener Joanne Roach

Fall Vegetable Gardening
Wednesday August 14
Master Gardener Joseph Smith

Location
Yulee Satellite Office
86026 Pages Dairy Road
Yulee, FL

Plant Clinics 10AM-2PM

Bring us your tired, diseased, insect infested plants yearning to be free of problems. When possible place your plant in a plastic bag to prevent chances of spreading issues to other plants. You will receive current researched based information on proper plant care, disease management and insect control. These sessions are free to the public. No registration required. Come anytime between 10AM - 2PM for expert advice.

Location
Yulee Satellite Office
86026 Pages Dairy Road
Yulee, FL

Trouble-shooting Landscapes: Efficient Irrigation

County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent, Rebecca Jordi and Master Gardener volunteers Paul Gosnell and Nelson Peterson will assist homeowners in reducing insect and disease issues on lawns and landscapes. These problems often result from too much water, shallow irrigation, or uneven coverage. They will demonstrate how to properly measure irrigation at one zone and then provide solutions for correcting discrepancies. Other cultural practices such as fertilization, proper mulching, planting depth of trees and shrubs, etc. will also be provided. In addition, Jordi and the Master Gardeners will diagnosis disease or insect issues on ornamentals at the site. The goal is to reduce frustrations and the cost of managing North Florida landscapes. Jordi requires at least 6 homeowners and will come to your subdivision for these free sessions. To schedule a "Trouble-shooting Landscapes" session for you and your neighbors, please call the Extension office at 904-879-1019, or email Ms. Jordi at rljordi@ufl.edu.

Spotlight on Nassau Gardens

Mary Ann and Merle Betts are the 3rd generation in his family to live on a very delightful farm in Hilliard, FL. In the 1920’s a European soldier gave grandpa Betts some snow pea seeds that he brought home to his family farm and planted them. These very delicious peas are still growing on their 65 acre farm today. They not only raise the special snow peas but also corn, peanuts, elephant garlic, potatoes, tomatoes and more. Pecan and Pine trees are additional assets on the farm.

Not only plants but also special Guernsey cows are living on the land. This year their granddaughter named a new baby cow, Lucy. Of course all of the family loves Lucy!!
Hello everybody! Welcome back to Harvest Gold! We are now at the height of our growing season. I am sure everyone is harvesting a bounty of fresh vegetables right about now. Tomatoes, squash, peas, peppers, beans....I could go on and on. But I have a confession to make. I did not have a spring garden this year. I wanted a spring garden. I planned a spring garden. I even planted a spring garden. But all I have growing in the field right now are some pitiful looking vegetable plants, and a whole bunch of weeds.

What happened to my spring garden, you ask. No, it was not the weather. Although it has been pretty dry, and the weather has not been too conducive to a lush garden, with a little fertilizer, a bit of work, and a whole lot of water, I could have produced something. To make a long story short, I experienced some health problems that prevented me from taking care of my garden as I should.

In April, I planted my spring garden as I always do. I planted corn, squash, butter beans, peas, watermelons, pumpkins, and several other vegetables. I then decided to go up to the mountains to visit a friend for a few weeks, and figured after I returned home, my veggies would be about the right size to fertilize, weed, and cultivate. The mountains were great, and I was enjoying my time up there, but just before I planned to return home, I noticed something strange going on in my right eye. I went to see an ophthalmologist in Sylva, North Carolina, who referred me to a retina specialist in Asheville. I was informed I had a detached and torn retina, and had to get it taken care of soon or I could lose sight in that eye.

I opted to have the surgery in Asheville, and following the operation, the surgeon gave me strict orders: no reading, no computer, no TV, no lifting anything over a couple of pounds, no bending over, and no driving or traveling. He also limited my activities to a whole lot of just sitting or lying around. So there I was, recovering from surgery, and unable to return home for at least another
month. In the meantime, my garden was suffering from neglect. (I do have to admit, there are worse places to recover from surgery than the Smoky Mountains! And I was blessed to have a great friend taking care of me, and making sure I followed the doctor’s orders—Thanks Stephen!).

I really do miss my spring garden. I miss watching the plants grow, and harvesting all those wonderful spring vegetables. For those of us who are avid gardeners, gardening is quite a rewarding experience, sometimes even bordering on the spiritual.

In this world we live in, we are faced with a great deal of stress every day. Gardening can help us relieve this stress. For 20 years, I was a teacher at a private school in Jacksonville. Most of the kids I taught were great kids, but some could be difficult at times. If I ever had a particularly trying day, I would always look forward to coming home and working in the garden. Working in the garden allowed me to blow off some steam and relieve the pressure. For me, gardening was very therapeutic.

When we garden, we get in touch with nature. Gardening soothes the soul, and invites us to slow down and enjoy the natural world around us. This is something that is missing in our fast-paced, technologically advanced world. And it is something that is necessary for our emotional and mental well-being. I know of some people who rarely even go outside because they are so wrapped up in their technology—their computers, XBoxes, Nintendos, Playstations, Wii systems, and various other technological contraptions. And when they do go outside, they are on their smart phones so much they do not even notice the beauty of Creation all around them.

Technology is supposed to make life easier, but I beg to differ with that opinion. Don’t get me wrong. Technology can be good in many ways, but can also add stress to life. Sometimes, we just need a break from technology, and gardening is an excellent way to make that happen. Nature is nurturing. Technology can be productive, but at times can be destructive as well. We must use and master technology, and not be used or mastered by technology. Again, this is where gardening comes in. Gardening helps us put our lives back into balance, and appreciate what is truly important.

Let us all make it a point to put away the computers, smart phones, computer games, and all that just for one day, and take a walk around the yard or in a park. Plant a plant. Spend time in a garden. Listen to the birds, Smell a flower. Enjoy the sunshine. Gaze at the moon and the stars. Notice the beauty and grandeur of the natural world. This can be very healing, very soothing, very refreshing. This is something we all need. Let nature refresh us, and once we do that, we are better able to handle the stresses modern life throws at us.

Before I go, I would like to leave you with several recipes that include peppers, one of our warm season crops that with proper care will produce from early June until the first frost. The first recipe comes from a good friend who is a tug boat captain, and is currently commanding a boat on the Mississippi River. It is a Cajun recipe that includes bell peppers, a pepper that is not only great raw, but also adds much flavor to cooking. The other two are tasty appetizers/hors d’oeuvres, one made with jalapeño peppers, and the other banana peppers.

Well folks, that’s about all for today. Have a great summer, God Bless, and Happy Harvesting!

Peace and Goodness,

Joseph
Captain Bump’s Red Kidney Bean Delight

Ingredients
1 Pound Red Kidney Beans (Large Ones—Not Goyas)
8-9 Dashes Worcestershire Sauce
4-5 Shots Tabasco Sauce
8 Cups Stock (Vegetable, Chicken, or Beef)
3 Tablespoons Olive Oil
3-4 Strips Bacon (Cut into 1½ Inch Chunks)
1 Large Onion (Medium Diced)
1 Large Bell Pepper (Medium Diced)
4 Stalks Celery (With or Without Strings, Diced)
1 Pound Andouille Sausage (Hot Spicy Cajun Sausage—Cut into 1/8 Inch Slices)
1 Teaspoon White Pepper
1 Teaspoon Black Pepper
1 Teaspoon Sea Salt
2 Teaspoons Cayenne Pepper
1 Teaspoon Basil
1 Teaspoon Thyme
2 Bay Leaves

Directions
Soak beans overnight in LOTS of water plus 8-9 dashes of Worcestershire sauce and 4-5 shots of Tabasco sauce for at least 20-24 hours. Drain but don’t rinse before using. Have everything ready before beginning to cook. Bring stock (I prefer chicken stock) to near boiling in a separate pot. Place oil in a cast iron Dutch oven, and sauté bacon until crispy. Add vegetables, and sauté for 3-4 minutes. Add Andouille on top of vegetables, mix, and sauté for 3-4 more minutes. Add half of the seasonings to the sautéing vegetables and sausage (Italian seasoning can be substituted for the basil and thyme). Add drained red beans, mix for 1-2 minutes, and then add near-boiling stock and rest of seasonings. Increase heat to boiling, then immediately turn down to simmer for 3-4 hours. (If you wish, mash a few beans at the end of cooking, about half a cup, to thicken.) Enjoy over rice with fresh French bread.

Notes
As I was growing up in New Orleans, we had red beans every Monday. I have always considered it the Monday meal. At Buster Holmes on Royal Street in the French Quarter, we could get a plate of red beans and rice with sausage and French bread and butter for $00.55. That’s right, 55 Cents! Of course this was in the 60’s. This recipe is a never-failer, and as with all Cajun foods, it is better the next day. I recommend making a pot and then freezing small amounts in containers for quick meals, that is if it isn’t all gone by the second day! This dish is Uhm Good, and contains good protein, good fiber, and is good all the way around. (Please note, seasonings can be adjusted according to your taste, and pepper can be adjusted to how hot you and your guests would like it. This recipe is low to medium hot, depending on how much Louisiana food you’ve tried.)

Recipe courtesy of Captain Bumpy Rhodes.
Jacob’s Stuffed Jalapeño Peppers

Ingredients

- 6 Large Jalapeño Peppers
- 6 Large Shrimp
- 3 Slices Thick Cut Bacon
- ¾ Cup Italian Seasoned Bread Crumbs
- 2 Large Eggs
- ¼ Cup Milk
- 2 Slices Swiss Cheese
- Salt and Pepper (To Taste)
- Vegetable Oil

Directions

Cut tops off peppers and discard. Carefully cut and remove inside membrane and seeds of each pepper and discard. Spread and place peppers in a microwave safe dish, and microwave for about 45 seconds on high. Flip and repeat. Let peppers cool to room temperature. Place seasoned bread crumbs into a large container, add salt and pepper, and mix. In another container, add eggs, and lightly beat. Add milk to eggs, and beat together. Cut cheese slices into three strips each, and set aside. Cut bacon strips in half, fry until they take on preferred crispness, drain on paper towels, and set aside. Shell and devein shrimp, season with salt and pepper, and fry in remaining rendered bacon fat, taking care to flip shrimp for even cooking. (Shrimp should be done when they become opaque.) Remove shrimp from heat, cut in half lengthwise, and set aside. Stuff each pepper with one slice of cheese, one piece of bacon, and two halves of shrimp. (Sometimes this can be difficult, and you may have to trim off parts of the cheese, bacon, and shrimp that do not fit fully into the pepper, and try to stuff that into the pepper. Stuffing is easier if you use a small fork, or narrow three pronged fork, to help place stuffing into the pepper.) If the selected peppers are not large enough to hold all the stuffing, trim off what does not fit inside the peppers, and stuff a few more peppers with what is left over. (Another method is to chop the stuffing ingredients, mix, and then stuff this mixture into the peppers—again, if you do this, you may need to use a few extra peppers to use up all of the ingredients.) Next, coat stuffed peppers with egg-wash. Dip the egg-washed pepper into the seasoned bread crumb mixture, and coat as evenly as possible. (If bread crumbs do not adhere well to the egg-washed peppers, you may have to repeat the egg-wash/bread crumb process three to four times or more to make sure peppers are well coated. If necessary, prepare more bread crumb mixture and egg-wash in order to thoroughly coat each stuffed pepper.)

Heat oil in a deep fryer to 375 Degrees Fahrenheit, or heat two cups of oil in a cast iron frying pan to 375 Degrees Fahrenheit. Once oil reaches the proper temperature, place one stuffed pepper at a time into a large slotted metal spoon or cooking spider, and gently submerge into the hot oil, taking care to keep the pepper within the slotted spoon or spider. Be sure to turn the pepper while frying to make sure the entire coating evenly browns. (It should take only about a minute or two for the coating to brown and cook the contents through. Some of the stuffing may leak out during this process, but that’s OK.) Once browned, remove pepper from oil, drain on a paper towel, and repeat this process for each pepper.

Notes

This appetizer is best served with your favorite cold beer or soft drink beverage. Also, you can use any firm sliced cheese you wish, and may omit the bacon and/or the shrimp if you desire. As always, good times, good friends, and good food. Enjoy!

Recipe courtesy of Jacob Sandoval.
Jim’s Stuffed Banana Peppers

Ingredients
18 Mild or Hot Banana Peppers
8 Ounces Cream Cheese
6 Ounces Tomato and Basil Seasoned Feta Cheese (Crumbled)
2 Teaspoons Parmesan Cheese

Directions
Remove stems from peppers and discard. Cut peppers in half lengthwise, and scoop out and discard seeds and veins. Soften cream cheese to room temperature. Combine all cheeses, and mix well. Stuff each pepper half with one teaspoon cheese mixture. (Depending on the size of the pepper, some peppers may take less than one teaspoon, some more. The important thing is to fill each pepper equally with the cheese mixture.) Place each stuffed pepper on a foil-lined cookie sheet. Set oven on broil, and place cookie sheet with peppers on middle rack of oven. Broil for approximately 8 minutes, or until dark golden brown. Serve hot with cold beer.

Notes
If you cannot find tomato and basil seasoned Feta, get 6 ounces of regular Feta, and season with garlic powder (not garlic salt), oregano, and black pepper to taste. Also, if you like a little more kick to your food, jalapeño or cowhorn peppers can be used instead of, or in addition to, the banana peppers. This recipe makes a great appetizer for your 4th of July party, or any summer cookout, and your guests will come back looking for more!

Recipe courtesy of Jim Frazel.
For several weeks now and almost on a daily basis, I’ve observed a cormorant and an egret working together to get food along the shoreline. The cormorant dives for fish, frogs and crustaceans, and, in turn, stirs up the water. The waiting egret is on shore ready and very willing to feed on the food that escapes capture from the cormorant.

The cormorant is a large black bird with a white crest and is found near rivers, lakes and along the coastline. It mainly eats fish (minnows) and hunts by swimming and diving.

The common egret is all-white, with black legs and a yellow bill. It mainly feeds on fish, frogs, small mammals and insects by spearing them with its long, sharp bill. Mostly the egret stands still along the shore or may wade through wetlands, waiting for its prey to come close. Once in awhile, he may wade into the pond!
Invasive Plant of the Month
Japanese Honeysuckle
Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida, IFAS

Introduction
The family Caprifoliaceae contains an assortment of ornamental plants that are used in the landscape, including Abelia, Kolkwitzia, Weigela, and *Lonicera japonica*. Abelia, Kolkwitzia, and Weigela are shrubs with showy, fragrant flowers that are used for shrub borders, groupings, or mass plantings. Highway designers, wildlife managers, and landscapers use honeysuckle for a variety of reasons. Managers of wildlife areas plant *Lonicera japonica* as it provides winter forage for deer. Lonicera is a favorite of gardeners and landscape architects because of its fragrant, beautiful flowers and fast growth. Highway designers use honeysuckle in order to control erosion and stabilize banks. Even though Japanese honeysuckle is a highly desirable, highly utilized ornamental, it has quickly become a problem in the U.S. due to its fast growth rate and ability to displace native plant species. *Lonicera japonica* has been placed on the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council’s list of invasive species because of these characteristics.

In 1906 Japanese honeysuckle was introduced to the United States from Japan for use as an ornamental plant [other sources state 1806]. In central Florida Japanese honeysuckle is found in Orange, Sarasota, Hillsborough, and Dade counties, and readily found in forest openings created by disturbance, disease or insect damage, or tree gaps. Lonicera is an opportunistic invader that will quickly colonize these areas. An established planting of honeysuckle is capable of engulfing small trees and shrubs, causing their collapse. Shading of plants in the understory can also occur, choking out many native species.

Description
*Lonicera japonica* is an evergreen, woody, twining vine. Ovate-shaped leaves are opposite, roughly 1 ½ to 3 inches long with variably pubescent petioles. The younger stems are reddish in color and are fuzzy or slightly pubescent. Hollow, older stems are hollow with brownish bark that peels.
in long strips. The stems are usually 80-120 feet long.

*Lonicera japonica* has fragrant, white flowers that fade to yellow and borne in pairs on axillary peduncles. Individual flowers are tubular, with a fused two-lipped corolla. Flower production occurs from late April through July, and sometimes through October. Many varieties available in the nursery trade are easily distinguished by flower color from the invasive honeysuckle. There is also a native honeysuckle that is often confused with the invasive species. *Lonicera sempervirens* (coral honeysuckle), the native honeysuckle, is easily distinguished from the invasive honeysuckle by its upper leaves and berries. Leaves of the native species are connate - forming a single leaf that the stem grows through. *Lonicera japonica* has black berries, while the native species possesses red to orange berries. The fruits are produced September through November. Each contains 2-3 ovate seeds that are 2-3 mm long, dark-brown to black in color.

Birds that consume the fruits and disperse the seed spread Japanese honeysuckle. However, this species is also capable of reproducing vegetatively by underground rhizomes, and aboveground runners. It also has the ability to develop a rather large seed bank after becoming established and seed germinate after soil disturbance. Wide habitat adaptability, wide seed dispersal, rapid growth rate, extended growing season, and lack of natural enemies make *Lonicera japonica* a strong competitor against native species.

**Impacts**

*Lonicera japonica* is able to displace native species by outcompeting native plants for light, space, water, and nutrients. *Lonicera japonica* grows very rapidly, and will send out runners that will root and grow anywhere. In nature, honeysuckle vines will twine around anything growing in close proximity, eventually covering small trees and shrubs. This can lead to the collapse of the trees and shrubs due to the mere weight of vegetation. Dense thickets of vegetation prevent the germination and growth of many native species, eventually preventing the replacement of understory shrubs and trees. Honeysuckle opens the door for many other invasive species to invade, further decreasing the natural diversity of forests or natural areas.

**Management**

**Preventative**

Regular monitoring and rouging of plants can prevent the spread and establishment of Japanese honeysuckle. Programs to educate homeowners on proper plant (honeysuckle) identification will also reduce the spread of this species.

**Cultural**

Native alternatives to Japanese honeysuckle for use in home landscaping include trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), and trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*). Wild ginger (*Asarum canadensis*) is an alternative ground cover in shady areas. Good ground cover will also prevent seed emergence and seedling establishment.

**Mechanical**

Hand-pulling, grubbing with a hoe or a shovel, and removal of trailing vines is practical for small infestations. Remove and destroy all plant material after cutting to prevent rooting and reinfestation. Periodic mowing can slow vegetative spread but may cause resprouting and increase stem density. Aggressive mechanical tillage is also effective, but may not be an option in many areas. However, soil disturbance may stimulate seed germination from the seed bank.

In fire-dependent natural communities, prescribed burning can control Japanese honeysuckle. Seedlings and young plants are susceptible to fire, however roots and shoots may survive a burn and resprout.

**Biological**

*Lonicera japonica* has few natural enemies in North America. There are no known biological agents for Japanese honeysuckle. Deer may forage on the plant, but cause limited damage.

**Chemical**

Timing of application is critical to effective Japanese honeysuckle control. Many herbicide treatments reduce foliage but leave buds and roots undamaged that can produce new growth. A foliar application of 1.5 to 3% glyphosate or 3 to 5% triclopyr shortly after the first frost appears to be the most effective treatment. Monitor treated plants in case a second herbicide application is necessary.
July Checklist

**Citrus:** Depending on citrus fertilizer label, apply fertilizer every six weeks or as directed. Check for citrus insects and disease. If adding horticulture oil or insecticidal soap be sure to use it only before 10am or after 6pm. Also be sure to use ultra-fine horticulture oil rather than dormant oil. Weed as needed, keep mulch away from trunk. Water once a week unless it rains.

**Fruit:** Remove about 1/4 to 1/5 of the oldest blueberry canes (usually 1 to 3 of the oldest canes.) Apply 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 fertilizer to nectarine. Weed as needed.

**Flowers:** Annuals to plant include celosia, coleus, crossandras, exacum, impatiens, kalanchoe, nicotiana, ornamental peppers, portulaca, torneias, salvia, and periwinkle.

**Bulbs:** Separate bulbs and give away to friends. Bulbs planted too deeply need to be removed. Transplant bulbs if the area is receiving too much water.

**Herbs:** Bay laurel, culantro, ginger, horehound, lavender, Mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, sesame, and thyme can be planted now.

**Roses:** Continue spray program. Water, water, water. Cut and remove spent blooms. Check for spider mites and aphids.

**Lawns:** Add iron sulfate to green up lawn but avoid high nitrogen fertilization or high amounts this month. “Take-all-root-rot” will be in full force during the summer - be sure to avoid over watering and over fertilizing.

**Perennials:** Cut off old flower heads, prune off dead or insect infested areas, and pinch off tips of stems to encourage denser growth.

**Trees:** Remove crape myrtle seed heads to encourage blooming through September. Remove old flower and seed stalks. Prune now for trees flowering in the winter. Palms should have a “palm special” fertilizer applied over the root system under the spread of the fronds. The configuration should be 8-2-12-4 (N-P-K-Mg). Ideally this would also include manganese, boron, sulfur, etc. with appropriate formulations. Use a slow release fertilizer. Many palms are deficient in potassium, in spite of using palm fertilizers. Apply Muriate of Potash to correct this deficiency.

**Vegetables:** It’s too hot to be planting anything now but lima beans, eggplant, okra, Southern peas, peppers, and watermelon. However, this is a good month to solarize your fall garden. Till your plot, moisten the soil, cover the ground with clear plastic. Place heavy objects around the edges to keep the plastic from blowing away. Let the sun bake your soil. It will help control fungi and nematodes. After 30 days till soil, replace the plastic and bake another few weeks. Plant your August or September garden.

Selected from Florida Vegetable Guide by JM Stephens, RA Dunn, G Kidder, D Short, & GW Simone, University of Florida and Month-by-Month Gardening in Florida by Tom MacCubbin
August Checklist

**Citrus:** Depending on citrus fertilizer label, apply fertilizer every six weeks or as directed. Check for citrus insects and disease. Weed as needed, keep mulch away from trunk and grass out beneath the canopy. Water once a week unless it rains.

**Fruit:** Apply azalea fertilizer to blueberry shrubs, at 1/2 pound per 3 feet of shrub. Weed as needed. Check irrigation to ensure it is working. Make repairs.

**Flowers:** Plant asters, balsam, begonias, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, cats whiskers, coleus, cosmos, cockscobs, dianthus, forget-me-not, gaillardia, golden globe impatiens, marigolds, melampodium, moon vine, pentas, periwinkles, petunias, phlox, porterweed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, scabiosa, strawflowers, sunflowers, tithonias, torenia, verbena, and zinnias.

**Roses:** Repeat July procedures. Water, water, water.

**Bulbs:** Plant African Iris, agapanthus, amaryllis, cannas, crinums, daylilies, gladioli, gloriosa lilies, society garlic, and rain lilies (Zephyranthes).

**Herbs:** Bay laurel, culantro, ginger, horehound, lavender, mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, sesame, and thyme can be planted now.

**Lawns:** There is still time to install a seeded lawn but do not delay. Select good quality seed such as Argentine Bahia, common bermudagrass or centipede. Initially the seeds to need stay moistened but once they have germinated irrigation can be reduced. These grasses do well without heavy irrigation and high nitrogen fertilizers. They turn brown earlier than St. Augustinegrass in the winter. Contact your local Extension service regarding a test for your soil pH. Common bermudagrass has a wide range of of pH numbers; bahia and centipede prefer acid soils so be sure to have soil tested before investing in a new lawn.

**Perennials:** Start salvia, violets, ruellia, lion’s ear, gerbera daisy, butterfly weed, and blanket flower from saved seeds,. Let seeds dry on the plants. When pods open, dry seeds inside on screen or cheese-cloth. Put into a plastic bag or a jar and label. Keep the seeds in the vegetable section of the refrigerator. Use within one year. Do not store in the freezer!

**Trees:** Cut back unwanted limbs to a branch angle or the trunk. Remove old fronds and seed stalks from palms. Do not apply paints or coverings to wounds. Remove old seedheads from crape myrtle trees to encourage additional blooms.

**Vegetables:** To produce fruit August plantings are especially important for corn, eggplant, pumpkins, peppers, tomatoes, and watermelons. Each of these crops takes about 90 days to come to fruition. Do not wait too late, or an early frost may reduce the yield. Other cold tolerant veggies to plant include snap beans, pole beans, lima beans, broccoli, cauliflower, collards, corn, cucumber, bunching onions, Southern peas, peppers, pumpkin, summer squash, tomatoes, turnips, and watermelons. One pest to be especially aware of is the cutworm.

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Nassau County is proud to provide you with this information. Horticulture News is a joint project with contributions by county agents and Master Gardener Volunteers.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Jordi,
County Extension Director
Horticulture Agent III

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**Fennel by Claudie Speed, Master Gardener**

Fennel, *umbelliferae*, has the distinction of being an aromatic herb of multiple uses. All parts are edible. The seed is actually the dry fruit and is used as a spice. The bulb is consumed as a vegetable. The leaf is used as a garnish and flavoring.

This delicate flowering herb indigenous to the Mediterranean, a relative of the carrot, makes a striking addition to your garden. It is usually short lived but in my part sun, part shade garden it flourishes nearly year round reaching a height of four feet, pale green-yellow flowers forming an umbel. It is one of the easiest herbs to grow, if you protect it from too much sun. It requires moderate fertilizer, water and tolerates salt air.

Leaves are used similarly to dill but with a different taste. Fennel (sometimes mistaken for dill) has a taste and smell of licorice or anise. It can be added to potato salads, pestos and dips.

The bulb is super crisp and refreshing eaten raw served with kosher salt or a dip and wonderful in salads. Fennel bulbs are available in the produce section of your food store, otherwise you would need to grow several plants and wait for maturity. Cooked fennel bulbs will melt into a savory sweetness.

Try this Sicilian recipe:

- 2 fennel bulbs thinly sliced
- 24 chopped black olives
- Segments from 2 oranges

Toss with 1 T olive oil.

Garnish 2 sliced mint leaves.

Enjoy!