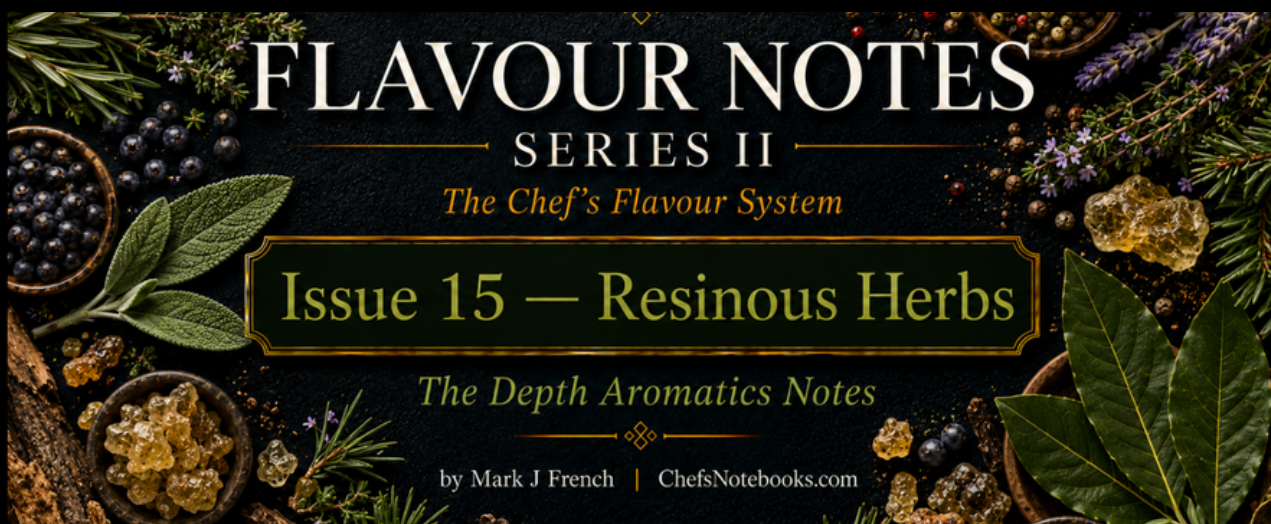




There are some herbs that seem to belong as much to the landscape as they do to the kitchen. Whenever I think of rosemary, bay and thyme, I'm transported straight back to our garden in England. We had enormous rosemary bushes that flowered every spring, a mature bay tree whose leaves seemed to find their way into countless casseroles and stocks, and beds of sage and thyme that perfumed the air every time they were brushed. Those same herbs became the heart of the traditional stuffings and slow-cooked dishes that still define so much of Britain's culinary heritage.

Later, while working in France, another resinous herb became part of my story. Every summer the lavender fields burst into colour, and I learned the delightful tradition of harvesting the stems and weaving them into fragrant wands—beautiful keepsakes that slowly released their perfume for months afterwards. They were a reminder that herbs can delight us long before they ever reach a plate.

Many of these herbs appeared individually in Series I, where we explored their history and characteristics in greater detail. This week, we look at them differently—not as individual ingredients, but as a family of depth aromatics that quietly shape the character of some of the world's most memorable dishes.





Kitchen Haiku

Fragrant mountain breeze
Wood, pine and warming sunlight
Depth without the weight

This Week's Focus

Resinous herbs provide depth rather than dominance. Their flavours are often described as pine-like, woody, earthy, camphoraceous, floral or gently bitter. Used thoughtfully, they build background complexity that supports other ingredients. Used carelessly, they can quickly overwhelm a dish. Understanding restraint is one of the most valuable lessons these herbs teach.



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Flavour Lens

Profile

Pine, woody, earthy, aromatic, floral, balsamic

Behaviour

Releases aromatic oils gradually during cooking, infuses fats and liquids exceptionally well, becomes stronger when dried

Balance Role

Adds depth, warmth and savoury complexity while supporting rich meats, root vegetables and slow-cooked dishes

Key Pairings

Lamb, pork, poultry, mushrooms, potatoes, garlic, onions, citrus, tomatoes, olive oil, honey



Chef's Insight

Resinous herbs provide depth rather than dominance. Their flavours are often described as pine-like, woody, earthy, camphoraceous, floral or gently bitter. Used thoughtfully, they build background complexity that supports other ingredients. Used carelessly, they can quickly overwhelm a dish. Understanding restraint is one of the most valuable lessons these herbs teach.

Click for Podcast: [Podcast #15-Resinous Herbs.mp3](#)

Ingredient Spotlight — Rosemary

Few herbs are as instantly recognisable as rosemary. Its needle-like leaves contain powerful aromatic oils that perfume oils, breads, roasted meats and vegetables with unmistakable Mediterranean character. Fresh rosemary is bright and resinous, while dried rosemary becomes more concentrated and should be used with greater restraint. Bruising whole sprigs before adding them to a dish releases more aroma without leaving chopped leaves throughout the finished preparation.

Kitchen Curiosity

The classic French bouquet garni is a lesson in subtlety. Herbs such as bay, thyme and parsley are tied together and gently infused into stocks, braises and soups before being removed. Their purpose is not to announce themselves, but to quietly build depth in the background—a perfect example of professional seasoning through infusion rather than visibility.

Around the World

The Mediterranean celebrates rosemary, thyme, sage and bay in slow-roasted meats and vegetables. France relies on herbes de Provence, where lavender is used sparingly to provide a distinctive floral note. Juniper defines many Northern European game dishes, while spruce tips and pine needles are increasingly finding their place in modern Nordic cuisine. Across these regions, resinous herbs contribute not just flavour, but a sense of place.





Kitchen Practice

Technique: Bruise woody herbs before adding them to oils, stocks or braises to encourage the release of aromatic oils.

Timing: Add sturdy herbs early to slow-cooked dishes; reserve delicate fresh sprigs for finishing where freshness and fragrance are the priority.

Common mistakes: Using excessive quantities, chopping woody stems too finely, confusing edible culinary herbs with ornamental or toxic species, or substituting concentrated essential oils for fresh herbs.

Professional approach: Allow resinous herbs to support the dish rather than dominate it. Infusion is often more effective than direct inclusion.



Practical Applications

- Roasted meats, poultry and game
- Stocks, stews, braises and bouquet garni
- Root vegetables and potatoes
- Breads, marinades and infused oils
- Syrups, cocktails and smoked preparations
- Honey, citrus and savoury preserves

Pairing Logic

Rosemary — lamb, potatoes, garlic, lemon, tomatoes

Bay — stocks, braises, beans, sauces, pickles

Sage — pork, poultry, butter, squash, onions

Thyme — mushrooms, chicken, tomatoes, root vegetables

Juniper — game, pork, cabbage, citrus, gin

Lavender — honey, citrus, lamb, berries, shortbread

Myrtle — pork, lamb, fish, Mediterranean marinades

Spruce Tips — game, fish, syrups, cocktails, smoked dishes



A practical application of this week's flavour system

Chump Chop Champvallon with Rosemary and Tomatoes

A rosemary-scented lamb chump chop Champvallon with layered potatoes, onions, tomatoes, garlic and stock, baked until the potatoes are tender, the lamb is juicy and the surface is lightly golden.

What This Dish Teaches

Resinous herbs are most successful when they work quietly. Rosemary perfumes the cooking stock, enriches the lamb, complements the sweetness of onions and tomatoes, and brings the potatoes to life without ever becoming the dominant flavour. It demonstrates that great aromatic cooking is often about balance rather than intensity.



Recipe: Lamb Champvallon with Rosemary, Onion & Tomatoes



The Liquid Counterpoint

A medium-bodied Côtes du Rhône or a lightly oaked Chardonnay complements the rosemary and lamb beautifully. Sparkling water infused with lemon and bruised rosemary also echoes the dish's aromatic character.



From the Chef's Garden

Woody herbs are among the most rewarding plants to grow. A mature rosemary bush or bay tree can provide years of harvest with very little attention, rewarding the cook season after season with fragrance that simply cannot be matched by dried supermarket herbs.



From the Kitchen

Bruise whole sprigs before adding them to a dish. Remove woody stems before serving, but leave the flavour behind.



Chef's Reflection

The finest aromatic herbs don't demand attention. They quietly shape the memory of a meal long after the last plate has been cleared.


— FLAVOUR NOTES —
Resinous Herbs
— The Depth Aromatics Notes —
Flavour System Focus: Foundations
Resinous herbs bring depth, complexity and earthy aroma — the forest in your food.

INGREDIENT / COMPONENT FAMILY							
Rosemary Pine-like, woody, aromatic  • Strong, piney, warm • Slightly bitter • Powerful and persistent Best for: Roasts, lamb, potatoes, bread, marinades, oils	Bay Leaf Woody, earthy, slightly bitter  • Warm, aromatic • Subtle bitterness • Releases more flavour with heat Best for: Soups, stews, sautés, beans, rice, stocks	Sage Earthy, woody, slightly camphorous  • Warm, aromatic, slightly bitter • Soft, resinous aroma Best for: Pork, poultry, butter sauces, stuffing, pasta	Thyme Woody, earthy, slightly minty  • Warm, earthy, aromatic • Subtle and complex • Intensifies with cooking Best for: Roasts, stews, veg, stocks, beans, marinades	Juniper Pine-like, resinous, slightly citrusy  • Woody, resinous, gin-like • Sharp and aromatic Best for: Game, venison, herb butter, marinades, gin	Lavender Floral, camphorous, slightly sweet  • Floral, sweet, resinous • Aromatic and soothing Best for: Lamb, desserts, syrups, teas, herb blends	Myrtle Pine-like, aromatic, slightly peppery  • Fresh, resinous, slightly spicy • Mediterranean character Best for: Game, stews, soups, marinades, herb blends	Pine / Spruce Tips Piney, citrusy, fresh  • Fresh, bright, forest-like • Aromatic and uplifting Best for: Infusions, syrups, oils, cured fish, cocktails

SYSTEM FUNCTION (WHAT IT DOES)		MECHANICS / BEHAVIOUR		KITCHEN PRACTICE									
 Builds Depth Adds layers of earthy complexity	 Adds Warmth Provides woody, resinous warmth	 Enhances Aroma Releases forest, pine and herbal aromas	 Balances Richness Cuts through fat and rich dishes	 Unites Dishes Bridges ingredients and brings harmony	 Releases Compounds Heat or crushing releases essential oils	 Builds Layers Adds layers of flavour as it cooks	 Transforms Over Time Infusions deepen and become rounder	 Infuses & Extracts Oils, butters and liquids capture aroma	 Heat Sensitive Overheating can make flavours bitter	 Bruise or Chop Bruise or chop to release aroma and essential oils	 Infuse & Remove Infuse in liquids or oils and remove before serving	 Add at the Right Time Add early for depth, late for aroma	 Use Sparingly Strong flavours — a little goes a long way

PAIRING LOGIC		APPLICATION / IN COOKING		ADVANCED COMPARISON	
Pairs well with earthy, rich, fatty and citrus notes.                         		Roasting Perfect with meats, potatoes and root vegetables. Braising & Stews Add early to build deep, layered flavour. Marinades & Rubs Use in marinades, dry rubs and butters for complexity. Infusions Infuse in oils, vinegars, butters, syrups and spirits. Smoking Use in smoking blends for aroma and forest notes. Breads & Baking Add to focaccia, sourdough and savory buns. Beverages Infuse in cocktails, tonics, teas and syrups.		 Rosemary Strong, piney, robust VS  Thyme Subtle, earthy, gentle  Bay Leaf Warm, woody, subtle VS  Sage Earthy, camphorous, robust  Juniper Resinous, citrusy VS  Myrtle Fresh, aromatic, peppery  Lavender Floral, sweet, soothing VS  Rosemary Woody, piney, savory  Pine / Spruce Tips Fresh, bright, citrus VS  Dried Herbs More concentrated, earthy	

CONTEXT & INTENT	PREPARATION TECHNIQUES	STORAGE / PRACTICAL TIPS	CHEF'S REMINDER
 Resinous herbs connect us to the forest and the wild. They add depth, tradition and a sense of place to every dish. From rustic stews to refined cuisine — they are timeless.	 • Bruise to release oils. • Chop or mince. • Steep in liquids. • Infuse in fats. • Smoke with woods. • Tie into a bouquet. • Dry properly for storage.	 • Store dried herbs in airtight containers away from light and heat. • Whole herbs keep longer. • Use within 6–12 months for best aroma. • Freeze fresh herbs in oil or chopped.	 Powerful flavours. Use with respect. A little resinous herb can elevate. Too much can overwhelm. Balance is the chef's signature.

—>>>> "From forest to flavour — depth begins with resonance." <<<<<<
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Further Reading & Resources

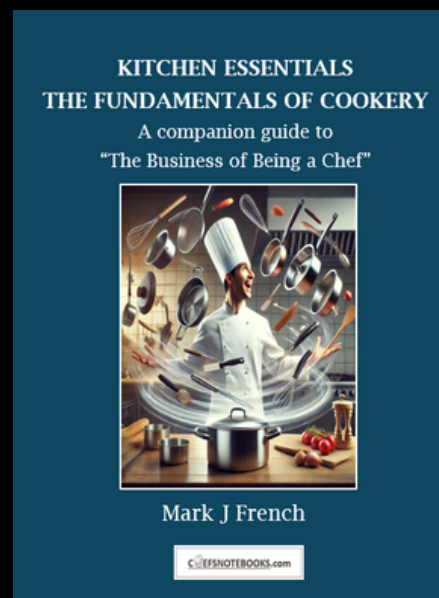
From the Library

See flavour balance charts and acidity mapping in the ChefsNotebooks archives.

Kitchen Essentials

The Fundamentals of Cookery

Beyond the techniques themselves, Chef French emphasises the importance of flavour development. He explores the five basic tastes, explains how to balance flavors, and stresses the crucial role of tasting throughout the cooking process. His passion for quality ingredients and wholesome menus shines through, encouraging readers to appreciate the natural flavours of food.



<https://chefsnotebooks.com/books>

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About the Author

Mark J French is a hotelier, chef, consultant, and author of several books on culinary arts and business. Based in the UK and Philippines, he blends classical training with global flavours.

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