



If you've been following Flavour Notes over the past year and a half, you'll know of my fascination with herbs and spices. Series I explored them individually, while Series II has been examining how families of ingredients work together to shape flavour. Last week we explored the resinous herbs—the quiet depth builders that reward time and gentle infusion. This week we move to the opposite end of the spectrum: the fresh herbs that bring brightness, freshness and life to a finished dish.

When I first started cooking, dried herbs were still the norm. We had parsley, mint and other herbs growing in the garden at home in the English countryside, yet they were rarely used to their full potential. As my career progressed and my travels broadened, fresh herbs became one of the most exciting discoveries in every new cuisine. Every market revealed unfamiliar varieties, every country offered new combinations, and every kitchen reinforced the same lesson: creativity has its place, but great flavour is always built on sound foundations.

As I write this, I'm already looking forward to next spring and planning my kitchen garden once again. Whether it's a small herb pot on a windowsill, a rooftop garden, a greenhouse or a larger vegetable plot, there is still nothing quite like walking outside, picking fresh herbs and adding them directly to a dish. The distance between garden and plate may only be a few metres, but the difference in flavour can be extraordinary.





Kitchen Haiku

Fresh leaves gently fall
One final touch brings life anew
The dish awakens

This Week's Focus

Fresh herbs are the finishing layer of flavour. Rather than building depth through prolonged cooking, they contribute brightness, freshness, delicate aroma and visual vitality. Their volatile oils are easily lost through excessive heat, making timing every bit as important as selection. Added thoughtfully, they provide the final lift that transforms a well-cooked dish into one that feels vibrant and complete.



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Flavour Lens

Profile

Fresh, green, bright, citrusy, floral, clean

Behaviour

Releases delicate aromatic oils rapidly, loses freshness with prolonged cooking, performs best when added towards the end of preparation

Balance Role

Brightens rich dishes, softens heaviness, adds freshness, creates contrast and visual appeal

Key Pairings

Fish, poultry, vegetables, salads, eggs, citrus, butter, olive oil, vinaigrettes, yoghurt, shellfish



Chef's Insight

One lesson has stayed with me throughout my career: creativity should always be supported by understanding. The finest herb combinations often remain the classical ones because they have stood the test of time. Innovation is exciting—but good judgement is timeless.

Click for Podcast: [Podcast #16-Fresh Herbs.mp3](#)

Ingredient Spotlight — Fresh Coriander

Fresh coriander (also known as cilantro) divides opinion perhaps more than any other culinary herb. For those who enjoy it, however, few ingredients provide such an immediate lift. A handful scattered over a curry, chilli or grilled fish moments before serving adds freshness that no dried herb could ever replicate. Timing is everything; added too early, much of its character simply disappears.

Kitchen Curiosity

Many herbs completely change their personality depending on whether they are used fresh or dried. Dill, chervil and basil lose much of their delicate fragrance when dried, while oregano and thyme often become more concentrated. Understanding which herbs belong in each form is part of a chef's seasoning judgement.

Around the World

Italy finishes pasta with basil and parsley. France celebrates chervil, tarragon and chives in its classic fines herbes mixture. Mexico scatters fresh coriander over tacos and moles. Southeast Asia layers Thai basil, mint and coriander into soups and salads, while the Middle East finishes dishes with generous handfuls of parsley, mint and dill.



FRANCE

Chervil,
tarragon
and chives



ITALY

Basil
and parsley



MEXICO

Coriander



THAILAND

Thai basil
and coriander



GREECE

Mint, dill
and parsley





Kitchen Practice

Technique: Chop fresh herbs immediately before use using a sharp knife to minimise bruising.

Timing: Add delicate herbs at the point of service or during the final moments of cooking.

Common Mistakes: Cooking fresh herbs for too long, chopping too far in advance, using dried herbs as direct substitutes, or overwhelming dishes with incompatible combinations.

Professional Approach: Match herbs to the character of the cuisine. Classical combinations endure because they create harmony rather than novelty for its own sake.

Practical Applications

- Salads, dressings and vinaigrettes
- Fish, shellfish and poultry
- Soups, curries and rice dishes
- Egg preparations and soft cheeses
- Cold sauces, compound butters and herb oils
- Garnishes, finishing blends and fresh relishes

Pairing Logic

Basil — tomatoes, mozzarella, olive oil, fruit, shellfish

Coriander — curries, chilli, citrus, avocado, grilled meats

Dill — salmon, cucumber, potatoes, yoghurt, eggs

Chervil — fish, eggs, chicken, cream sauces, spring vegetables

Chives — potatoes, eggs, soft cheese, seafood, vinaigrettes

Tarragon — chicken, salmon, mustard, vinegar, butter

Parsley — garlic, lemon, shellfish, mushrooms, grains

Mint — lamb, peas, yoghurt, fruit, grains, chilli





A practical application of this week's flavour system

Cold Poached Salmon with Herbal Champagne Vinaigrette

Individual salmon fillets gently poached in an aromatic court-bouillon, chilled until perfectly succulent, then finished with a Champagne vinaigrette enriched with fresh chives, tarragon, dill, chervil and parsley.

What This Dish Teaches

Fresh herbs are at their finest when treated with restraint. Rather than dominating the salmon, they bring brightness, elegance and freshness through the vinaigrette, illustrating how the finishing layer can completely transform the final perception of a dish.



Recipe: Poached Salmon with Herbal Champagne Vinaigrette



The Liquid Counterpoint

A well-chilled Sancerre or a crisp English sparkling wine complements the herbal freshness beautifully. For a non-alcoholic alternative, sparkling elderflower and lemon provides similar brightness without competing with the delicate herbs.



From the Chef's Garden

Few moments are more satisfying than stepping into the garden with a pair of scissors and gathering herbs moments before service. Fresh herbs are one of the simplest ways to improve everyday cooking, and they are among the easiest ingredients to grow successfully almost anywhere.



From the Kitchen

Taste before adding more herbs.

Freshness should lift the dish, never disguise it.



Chef's Reflection

Fresh herbs remind us that the final touch is rarely the least important. Often, it is the one that lingers longest in the memory.


FLAVOUR NOTES
Fresh Herbs
— The Finishing Layer —
Flavour System Focus: *The Finishing Layer*
Fresh herbs bring brightness, aroma and life — the final touch that awakens a dish.

INGREDIENT / COMPONENT FAMILY							
BAZIL Sweet, aromatic, slightly peppery  - Bright, sweet flavour - Adds freshness - Best for: tomatoes, mozzarella, pasta, dressings	PARSLEY Fresh, clean, slightly grassy  - Clean, mild flavour - Brightness and lift - Best for: soups, meats, salads, sauces	CORIANDER (CILANTRO) Zesty, citrusy, herbaceous  - Distinctive, lively - Adds lift and contrast - Best for: curries, chilies, salmon, seafood	CHIVES Mild onion, delicate  - Subtle onion flavour - Adds colour and delicacy - Best for: eggs, potato, soups, vinaigrettes	DILL Fresh, feathery, slightly aniseed  - Light, aromatic - Perfect with fish and dairy - Best for: chicken, eggs, borscht, vinaigrettes	TARRAGON Aniseed, sweet, slightly peppery  - Elegant, aromatic - Adds sophistication - Best for: chicken, eggs, borscht, vinaigrettes	MINT Cool, refreshing, vibrant  - Cooling, fresh - Adds brightness - Best for: salads, yoghurt, lamb, desserts	CHERVIL Delicate, fresh, slightly aniseed  - Very delicate flavour - Perfect finishing herb - Best for: soups, eggs, fish, fine French cuisine

SYSTEM FUNCTION (WHAT IT DOES)			MECHANICS / BEHAVIOUR			KITCHEN PRACTICE							
 Brightness Adds brightness and lift to balance richness and depth.	 Adds Aroma Enhances subtle and bold aromas, provides instant aromatic lift.	 Enhances Appearance Adds colour, texture and visual vitality to finished dishes.	 Creates Balance Softens bitterness and adds contrast and harmony.	 Final Touch The last addition that completes and elevates the dish.	 Delicate Oils Contains naturally rich essential oils that evaporate quickly with steam heat.	 Heat Sensitive Best added towards the end of cooking or just before serving.	 Timing Matters Gentle handling and precise timing preserve brightness and aroma.	 Best Mediums There is little or no water in herbs, so they are best used with fats, oils and vinegars.	 Layer Finish Added as the finishing layer to enhance and uplift the whole dish.	 Add at the End Add fresh herbs in the last moments of cooking or after heat.	 Handle Gently Bruising or heavy chopping can cause herbs to lose their delicate oils.	 Use What's Best Some herbs (dill, chervil, cilantro) are best used fresh and never cooked.	 Store Smart Keep herbs fresh in the fridge in a damp paper towel or jar of water.

PAIRING LOGIC			APPLICATION / IN COOKING			ADVANCED COMPARISON		
Fresh herbs thrive with ingredients that share or contrast their vibrant nature.            			Finish & Garnish Sprinkle or place fresh herbs on top just before serving for maximum impact.  Mix into Dressings & Sauces Stir into vinaigrettes, yoghurts, mayonnaise and sauces for freshness and lift.  Fold into Warm Dishes Add to pasta, risotto, soups or rice dishes off the heat to preserve flavour.  Herb Butters & Oils Blend herbs into softened butter or infuse into oils for flavour-packed finishes.  Stuffings & Fillings Use in stuffings, mousses, terrines or grain salads for aromatic complexity.  Serve Raw Use in salads, relishes, tabbouleh, salad leaves and fresh herb crumbles. 			Same Herb — Different Impact  VS   VS   VS   VS  VS VS		

CONTEXT & INTENT		STORAGE / PRACTICAL TIPS		AROUND THE WORLD		CHEF'S REMINDER	
Fresh herbs are the voice of vibrancy in a dish — they bring life, clarity and a final signature.  Use with intention to celebrate the ingredients, the season and the cuisine.		• Store in the fridge in a damp paper towel or in water like a bouquet. • Use within a few days for best flavour and aroma. • Wash and dry gently before use. • Freeze herbs in oil or butter for longer storage. • Grow your own — nothing beats garden-to-plate.		Italy: Basil and parsley finish pasta and soups. Mexico: Coriander adds brightness to salsas and tacos. France: Chervil, tarragon and chives define classic cuisine. Asia: Thai basil, mint and coriander bring freshness to soups and salads. Middle East: Parsley, mint and dill finish vibrant dishes.		Handle with care. Add at the right time. A small handful of fresh herbs at the end can elevate good cooking to exceptional. 	

"Fresh herbs are the final brushstroke that brings a dish to life."

Fresh Versus Dried Herbs

Form	Character	Best Use
Fresh	Bright, green, delicate and aromatic	Finishing, salads, sauces, garnishes
Dried	Concentrated, earthy and less nuanced	Long cooking, marinades, spice blends
Tender Leaves	Fragile and highly aromatic	Add at the last moment
Stalks and Stems	Firmer and often more robust	Stocks, poaching liquids and infusions



Last Word

"Fresh herbs are not the finishing touch because they are least important. They are the finishing touch because they deserve to be noticed last."

Further Reading & Resources

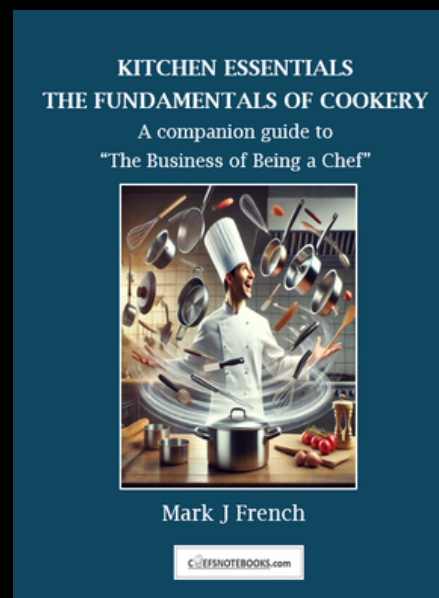
From the Library

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.