

Q&A

How should I store flavored oils and butters?

Some people like to let their homemade flavored butters and oils sit at room temperature, flavors melding, until they need them. But it's a good idea to refrigerate them, since they don't contain preservatives like commercial products. As long as you keep your homemade product in the refrigerator and use it within a month or so, it'll be fine—and fresher tasting than the commercial variety.

You can also freeze your butter, and it will keep for six months or so. Here's how: After mixing your butter, refrigerate it until it's solid enough to handle. Then form it into a log, wrapping it in freezer wrap. Twist the ends shut and place in the freezer. To use, simply unroll, slice off what you need, rewrap and put it back in the freezer. Or, for an elegant, fun touch, you can fill a pastry bag with the butter (after it's been refrigerated) and fit the bag with a decorator tip (like a large star or a flower). Pipe the butter onto a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper and refrigerate until hard. Then carefully remove the shapes and place them in a plastic bag. Place the bag in the freezer and pop one (or a handful) out whenever you need it.

When making flavored oils, which oils should I use with which spices?

In general, it's a good idea to use oils that aren't too distinctive—like safflower, sunflower and canola—so that the aroma and flavor of the spices shines through. Just about any good oil will work, though, if you choose the appropriate spices. Stronger-tasting oils, like peanut or sesame, for example, will partner well with stronger-tasting flavors like garlic and ginger. And although it's distinctive, healthful olive oil is a favorite for flavoring.

Why Buy Bulk Spices?

Want the freshest spices along with the most flexibility and fun while shopping? Then buying in bulk is for you. Comparison shop for a few spices, and you'll see why bulk is your best choice:

> Price

You'll pay from three to 10 times more for the same amount of spice if you buy it in bottles instead of in bulk! (You—and the environment—have to pay for all those jars and labels, after all.)

> Freshness

As you measure your spices from the bulk jars, relish the aroma, color and texture of each. You know that these spices are fresh because the stock is updated often. They're bright, not faded, richly aromatic, not faint. Your senses can't judge the color or aroma of prepackaged spices, because they're hidden away.

> Versatility

Whether you're stocking up on your favorite cooking staples or just buying a pinch of this or that for a particular recipe, when you buy in bulk, you'll always have the right amount. You don't have to buy an entire package of that exotic spice you'll use only once a year, and you don't have to purchase multiple packages of a basic pickling spice to last through canning season.

> Fun

With bulk spices, you can decide to buy a smidgen of something that strikes your fancy just for fun (chances are there will be plenty of enticing choices). Once home, you'll enjoy replenishing your spice jars, and you'll look forward to cooking with these wonderful, fresh seasonings. Shopping for bulk spices is an all-around satisfying experience!

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How to Make Your Own Flavored Butter and Oils

BUTTER: Use unsalted butter or natural margarine. You can always salt later, to taste, but for starters you don't want the salt competing with the other flavors.

OILS: Olive, sunflower, safflower, peanut, canola, and sesame are good choices. (See Q&A.)

SPICES: Those that partner especially well with butter and oil include: basil, cayenne, chervil, chives, dill, garlic, lemon peel, lemon thyme, peppermint, marjoram, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, savory, spearmint, tarragon, and thyme.

OTHER ADDITIONS: Add a squirt of lemon juice to perk up your butter, or some grated cheese (Parmesan is classic), dry mustard, honey, or maple syrup. Pine nuts are often added to pesto (a thick, pasty Italian basil oil often served with pasta); tomatoes to pistou (a French version of pesto); and anchovies to bagna cauda (a traditional Italian butter served fondue-style in an earthenware pot).

GETTING STARTED: Simply combine 1 tablespoon or more of your favorite spices (or combination of spices) with ½ cup of softened butter or oil. (You can cook the spices for a few minutes in the oil, if you like, to impart a roasted taste.) Taste and adjust your seasonings. Sometimes you'll want a potent butter or oil; other times a subtler version will be more appropriate. You may need a flavorful, rich concentration to add to a marinade, for example, but something milder for your potato topping. If you go a little overboard, simply mix with plain butter or oil to dilute the flavor. Be sure to make plenty because once you start using these delicious butters and oils, you'll be amazed at their versatility.

SOME DELECTABLE USES FOR FLAVORED BUTTERS:

- Seasoning fish or seafood—especially scallops, salmon, shrimp and steamed clams (Spread on before grilling or baking, or use as a topping after cooking.)
- Swirling in risotto, just before serving
- Adding to creamy soups
- Spreading on burger or sandwich buns
- Topping mashed potatoes or other vegetables
- Tossing with hot pasta
- Spreading on corn on the cob

AND FOR FLAVORED OILS:

- Marinating or seasoning meat, poultry, fish, or tofu before cooking
- Sautéing or stir-frying any vegetable, fish, poultry, tofu, or tempeh
- Dipping crusty breads
- Mixing salad dressing

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FLAVORED BUTTERS & OILS

Spice-flavored butters and oils are the magic wands of cookery, instantly turning a simple plate of vegetables or a ho-hum grain entrée into a gourmet dish. You'd think this enchantment would be harder to come by, but delicious butters and oils are very simple to make, keep for weeks in the refrigerator, and can be whipped up with whichever of the following ingredients you happen to have on hand!

You don't need a recipe to make flavored butters and oils, but here's a handful for inspiration:

Lemony pasta butter

Place a big dab of this flavorful butter on hot pasta, sprinkle with Parmesan and coarsely ground pepper, and you've created a delightful main dish! It's also terrific on baked potatoes.

- ½ cup softened butter or margarine
- 1 teaspoon chervil leaf
- 1 teaspoon marjoram leaf
- ½ teaspoon lemon peel
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice

Combine all ingredients and mix well. Store in a small glass jar in the refrigerator, or freeze for use as needed.



Breakfast butter

No more boring morning toast! Serve this spread with toast, cinnamon rolls, or bagels, or on pancakes, waffles, or French toast.

- ½ cup softened butter or margarine
- 2 tablespoon honey or maple syrup
- ⅓ teaspoon cardamom powder
- 1 teaspoon thyme or peppermint or rosemary leaf

Combine all ingredients and mix well. Warm to pour over a breakfast dish, or serve soft to spread on breads, or warm to pour over a breakfast dish.

Annatto Oil

Used in Latin American cooking, annatto imparts a lovely, warm, red color to sauces and grains. We've added a few spices for our own version.

- ½ cup olive oil
- 2 teaspoon annatto seeds
- 1 teaspoon basil leaf
- 1 teaspoon parsley leaf

Heat oil in a small skillet. Add seeds, basil, and parsley and stir, cooking until oil is reddish/orange and warm. Strain the oil, and store in glass jar, covered, in the refrigerator.

