

Using Fresh Oregano

NDOG

**Nashville
Demonstration
Organic
Garden**



Oregano

Oregano is often referred to as the "pizza spice" or a Greek herb. It gets these connotations because it grows wild in the mountains of Greece and Italy. In Greek, the word "oregano" means "joy of the mountain." Oregano has tiny, but pungent leaves and is regarded as a very strong herb. When dried, the leaves are considered to be even more pungent. Oregano is widely used in Italian and Greek cooking, but it also grows well in America and the United Kingdom, so it has been adapted for many modern and new recipes.

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Cut the small leaves from the woody stems with scissors, if you are using fresh oregano.

Wash the leaves thoroughly before using them. Take the leaves in your hands and roll them between your palms to crush them and release the natural oils, and then place them in the recipe.

Make a bouquet garni for soups, stews or stock - A *bouquet garni* (French for "garnished bouquet") is a bundle of herbs typically tied together with string and used to prepare soup, stock, and various stews. The bouquet is cooked with the other ingredients, but removed prior to consumption. To prepare a bouquet garni, wash the oregano plant *with the leaves on the stems*. Tie the oregano to thyme, basil, parsley, rosemary, tarragon and/or bay leaves with a string. Drop it in a stock mixture and allow it to simmer until all the flavors are imparted into the mixture.

Use oregano in pizza and pasta sauces - Oregano pairs very well with tomatoes and other Mediterranean herbs, such as basil. **Add the oregano toward the end of the cooking process to help maximize its natural flavor.** Experiment by adding 1 tsp fresh oregano or 1 tsp dried oregano to your pasta or pizza sauces. Raise or lower the dose based on your preference.

Make a vinaigrette - Add 1/2 tsp dried oregano or 1/2 tsp of fresh oregano to a vinaigrette to create an Italian or Greek-style vinaigrette. Serve it on a bed of fresh greens with tomatoes, cucumbers, Kalamata olives and feta cheese.

Add to a marinade or sauce with other ingredients that pair well with oregano - These include olive oil, vinegar, garlic, basil, onion, parsley and thyme. They make an excellent marinade for lamb, beef or chicken.

Substitute oregano for marjoram or thyme if you lack those ingredients. Marjoram is a type of oregano and thyme has a similar flavor, so they can be used to almost the same culinary effect. Marjoram, *Origanum majorana*, belongs to the genus oregano. There are more than 50 types of oregano, and all of these plants are part of the mint family. Marjoram tends to have a more subtle flavor, so feel free to use it to replace the stronger taste, if you prefer.

Add oregano after you sauté or cook broccoli, zucchini, onion, eggplant or cauliflower - You may also want to add it earlier in stewed dishes with these strong-flavored vegetables. Both the vegetable and the herb pair well with olive oil.

Create an appetizer by covering crostini, or toasted bread, with a thin layer of provolone cheese - Sprinkle fresh, diced oregano leaves on top of the cheese and place in the grill or broiler for 5 minutes. Serve immediately.

Add a small amount of oregano along with basil and other herbs to steamed seafood dishes, such as mussels and clams - It also can be used to marinate and flavor seafood, but you should use it in low amounts because of its somewhat bitter taste.

The flowers of the oregano plant can also be eaten in salads. They are purple or pink. They impart a slightly different, but spicy flavor.

Visit Nashville Demonstration Garden, NDOG, each Friday May through September during market hours.



Check out the Howard County Farmers' Market page at nashvillear.com for updates on what is happening in the garden and what is expected at market . . .

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