

HSA West District Gathering: Craft Sessions at Morningsun Herb Farm

Herbal Wreaths for Homemade Soups

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THE **Herb** COMPANION

The following is based on an article by Jim Long (HSA) in the D/J 2007 issue of Herb Companion.

For centuries, herbalists and gardeners have used wreaths to preserve the beauty of herbs and flowers long after the harvest has passed. In addition to their aesthetic value, herbal wreaths can add a delicious twist to your soups and stews this winter. Delightfully dainty, these wreaths add flavor and whimsy to your favorite soups.

I started making these tiny wreaths many years ago as little holiday thank-you gifts. I'd package the little circle of herbs in nice tissue paper, with a ribbon and recipe card attached, and present them to friends. I used this method to teach children about the uses of herbs in my garden, but learned that adults enjoy making them as much as children do.

The completed wreath is small, only about 5 inches in diameter. I've found this size to be perfect to season a pot of soup when the wreath is added near the end of cooking. A larger wreath would be too much seasoning for a regular stew pot.



Suggested Herbs for Soup Wreaths

Any of the seasoning herbs can be used. It's best to use long-stemmed herbs, to make it easier and more fun to weave. I often construct the wreath for a specific kind of soup. For example, if I am going to attach a recipe for chicken soup, I would choose six or so from the following herbs for the wreath:

- Rosemary, thyme, celeriac leaves, garlic chives, garlic leaves, sweet marjoram, small lovage leaves, parsley, lavender, lemon grass, winter savory and lemon basil.

For a beef- or pork-based soup, I might choose from this list:

- Rosemary, chervil, thyme, savory, onion leaves, chives, garlic



chives, tarragon, oregano, basil, hyssop, bay and small hot peppers.

A vegetarian-based recipe could draw from any of the herbs on either list.

Constructing the Wreath

To begin the wreath, gather your ingredients. You will need about 6 sprigs of herbs in varying lengths. Longer pieces can be woven into the wreath more easily than shorter ones. You will probably also want 3 or 4 shorter pieces to add into the wreath for bulk and variety.

Choose a sprig of rosemary or a similar woody, long-stemmed herb, about 12 to 14 inches long. Bend it into a loop that is about 4 inches in diameter, twisting the ends around each other. You don't need to tie it in place, simply hold it together with your thumb and finger, then add another long-stemmed herb, twisting it over and around the first one and overlapping the ends of the first.

Continue adding additional sprigs — a piece of sage, some thyme, onion leaves, garlic chives and others — until your wreath looks full. Keep in mind the wreath will shrink as it dries, so add enough herbs to keep it looking full after it dries.

Add a long leaf, such as an onion top from winter onions or a leaf of lemon grass, at the very last, spiraling it like a ribbon all the way around to secure all of the herbs and give it a finished look.



The two ends of the spiraled leaf can be tucked under some of the other herbs and any loose ends can be trimmed off with pruners. You also may want to tuck in a nice, small red pepper or a sprig of golden marjoram for some color. Chive flowers dry well, as do garlic chive blossoms and oregano. Tuck the stem into the wreath so it is secure.

Dry Your Wreath and Prepare the Gift

Now you are ready to dry your wreath. The simplest way is to put it in a dark, dry place, like a pantry or a cabinet, until it is dry. Even the oven, without

heat, works well. It's important to dry your wreath out of light in order to maintain the vibrant color and flavor of your herbs. In summer the wreath will dry in 4 to 5 days. However, I generally dry mine in a food dehydrator, which has a temperature control and remains dark inside. If I use basil or parsley in my wreath, I dry it on a low setting to keep the herb's good, deep coloring.



Don't, however, dry the wreath in the microwave. That's the worst way to dry any herb, because the microwaving process vaporizes the essential oils in the plant. Also, hanging the wreath in the kitchen isn't a good method for drying. Light and cooking odors will diminish your wreath's flavor and color.

Once your wreath is completely dry, you are ready to attach a recipe card containing instructions for using the wreath with a ribbon or string (the card and string should be removed before cooking). Wrap the completed wreath in tissue paper or seal it in a plastic sandwich bag and store it in an airtight container, out of light, until ready to use or give away.



When giving the wreath as a gift, I attach a recipe card like the following: *"This is a cooking wreath from my garden. It contains the right amount of herbs to season*

a pot of soup. Here's a simple recipe, or use the wreath with your own favorite soup recipe."

A clear cellophane bag with a header tag makes a nice presentation,

Jim Long's Wintertime Chicken Soup

*2 1/2 quarts of water
2 chicken breasts, cut in pieces
1 stalk celery, diced
1/2 cup diced onion
2 carrots, peeled and diced
1/4 cup rice or pasta, optional
Herbal cooking wreath
Dash salt and pepper, to taste*

Bring water to a boil and add chicken and vegetables. Cook until chicken is tender, about 20 minutes. Add rice or pasta and reduce heat to a simmer, cooking 10 to 15 minutes.

When you add rice or pasta, also remove the ribbon from the cooking wreath and add the wreath to the pot of simmering soup. Simmer until done, add salt and pepper to taste, remove wreath and serve.

Jim's Vegetarian Soup

*2 1/2 quarts of water
Assorted, diced vegetables, such as celery, carrots, turnip, cabbage, onion and garlic
1/4 cup rice or pasta
Cooking wreath
Dash salt and pepper, to taste*



Bring water to a boil. Add vegetables and simmer until tender, about 20 minutes. Add rice or pasta and simmer until nearly tender. Add the cooking wreath (with the ribbon removed) and simmer for another 10 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste, remove wreath and serve.

Jim's Generic Soup

Combine meat and vegetables in a cook pot with water or broth. Bring to a boil, then slowly simmer. During the last half hour of cooking, drop the entire soup wreath into the pot. You will love the flavor and aroma!

