

How To Store Dry Herbs

1. Store in Airtight Containers. Oxygen will degrade herbs over time, so storing your dried herbs in airtight containers is best. Glass jars are the absolute best. Glass allows the herbs to breathe, keeps excess air and moisture out, and maintains the integrity of the herb for the longest period of time. If the lid of the jar you are using has cardboard in the inner lid, remove it, as it invariably contains moisture. Avoid using plastic if possible, as it may leach chemicals into your herbs. I like to store my dried herbs in glass canning jars. I love that they come in all different sizes as some herbs I use a lot of and others I only use sparingly.

2. Keep Out of Direct Sunlight. While those rays of sunlight hitting your jars of herbs might look pretty, they are actually doing damage to the potency of the herbs. Heat and Light will destroy the essence of the herbs very quickly. For this reason, it's best to store them out of direct sunlight. Keep them in a closed cabinet or make a curtain to cover them if need be.

3. Keep in a Cool and Dry Location. You want your herbs to stay cool and dry for maximum shelf life. Do not store them near a hot stove or in a steamy bathroom. We keep ours in a kitchen cabinet, not over the stove where there is extra heat and moisture, and where they are easy to see and remember to use. Remember the words – “cool, dark and dry.”

4. Be Sure to Label Purchase Date. Keeping track of how old your herbs are is an important habit to develop. Whenever you put a new herb on the shelf, label what it is and when it was harvested or purchased. Make sure to label your herbs with a name and date! I can tell you from experience that Lemon Balm and Mint tend to look a lot alike, as do many other herbs. If you don't want to play the 'taste it and try to guess what it is' game, then make sure you label them!

Also, make sure herbs pass the smell test before using. Just open the container and give it a big sniff. If the herbs smell rancid, moldy or just 'off' don't use them. If they don't seem to smell at all then crush a leaf between your fingers. This will release the oils in the herbs and should renew the scent. As herbs age they lose their potency and you may need to use a little extra in your recipe to get the same effect or taste. How long will dried herbs last? There is no definitive answer - it depends. Color, they should retain the same color as when it was fresh with very little color variation. Smell - herbs have distinctive odors that are an effective means to determine quality. They should smell strongly, not necessarily “good.” If they have no smell, they should be tossed. Remember Valerian will not smell nice, but as long as it smells like “dirty socks” it is good to use. Taste, herbs should have a distinctive fresh flavor, not necessarily good, depending on the herb, rather on the “potency of the flavor.” Do they taste Fresh? Vital? Strong? Distinctive? Effect, herbs must work effectively. If your herbs are not working, suspect first its quality. The shelf-life of an herb is determined by how long it retains its quality of freshness.

Here is a good list to follow when labeling:

-Name

-Botanical name

-Harvest date (if known)

-Purchase date (if applicable)

-Organic/Wild-crafted.

Having the highest quality herbs is something that all herbalists should strive for, and it isn't hard if a little care is taken. Labels with names and dates take all the guesswork out of it, and you can get into a system of replenishing when the need arises. Make your herbal apothecary your space, treat it like a special place, and your dried herbs will last for quite a while. If you follow these tips for storing dried herbs, you will have the freshest herbs possible in your herbal apothecary!