

## Drying herbs

by Dana L Woodruff~ Community herbalist, [Dandelioness Herbals](#), Montpelier, Vermont ©2010



When you gather the whole aboveground part of the plant, including the stem, you can dry them in bunches. You want these bunches small enough for air to circulate so the plant can dry thoroughly. You can tie the bunches with string or use rubber bands, which will adjust as the water evaporates and the stems get smaller. Hang the plants out of direct sun with good air circulation. If your indoor space is damp or doesn't have good ventilation, cars make great drying rooms. In my backseat I tie a string between the handholds and hang the plants on the line with paperclips bent to create two hooks. The rubber band or string can also be looped

around the line. If the weather's not rainy, leave your windows down a bit for air circulation, and either park in the shade or drape cloth up to protect the plants from direct sunlight. Leaves, flowers, stems, and bark can also be dried by laying them in baskets or on screens (nylon, not metal). Depending on the weather and the herb's moisture content, your herbs may be completely dry in just a couple days, while others may take several days.

For drying roots, you first want to wash the soil off of them. When washing, remember not to use water that's too hot. As an herbalist I once apprenticed with told me, "We're washing roots, not making tea!" Some folks choose to dry roots whole, but I like to slice roots with knife while they are fresh and easier to cut. You can dry your whole roots or root slices in baskets, on screens, or in the oven, as described above.

**Storage:** Dried herbs should be stored in airtight containers, preferably glass jars. To help the dried herbs maintain their vitality, store them in a dry area away from direct sunlight and extreme temperatures. Be sure to label your jars and bags! Really! Just do it! I know every harvest is so special that we'll never forget it, but you'll be so happy when you don't have to make a 'what is *this*?!' pile of herbs. Many herb books will tell you to use your dried herbs within 6 months or a year, and your dried roots within 3 years. However, I know an herbalist who comes from a long line of medicine makers who said she has herbs and roots that are many years old and still good medicine. Use your judgment and your senses (sight, smell, taste) to decide whether an herb or root still possesses its vital essence.

