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# Sage advice on Thanksgiving recipes with sage

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BY MARY ANN CASTRONOVO FUSCO

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The last of the peppers has long been picked, the basil has withered away. Yet, in my modest garden, one hardy plant still stands tall, ready for its star turn on the Thanksgiving table. It is sage.

Traditionally used in turkey stuffing recipes, fresh sage imparts full-bodied fragrance and flavor when tucked under the skin of any bird, or even placed atop pork or veal. It also pairs well with the season's squashes and mushrooms, says Bruce Lefebvre, executive chef at The Frog and the Peach in New Brunswick.

Home cooks shouldn't be put off by the fuzzy texture of the grayish-green leaves, which disappears in cooking. "I wouldn't recommend dried sage for anything. It has a bitter flavor; it's very perishable," says Lefebvre.

At his restaurant, he adds fresh sage, along with cracked pepper, to prosciutto used to wrap tuna before searing. He also recommends mixing a tablespoon of minced sage along with fresh parsley into each pound of ricotta in pasta casserole dishes. Frying whole sage leaves in browned butter seasoned with chili flakes makes a simple but savory pasta dressing. Sprinkling chopped sage on one of the pastry leaves in apple strudel lends "an earthy note that brings the dish to a different level," he adds.

Used for centuries as a medicinal herb — and, indeed, a few leaves steeped in boiling water may relieve a scratchy throat — sage belongs to the *Salvia* genus, whose name stems from *salvus*, which is Latin for "healthy." The herb came to be associated with improved memory and wisdom, and was believed to dispel negativity.

Looking to banish the doldrums on a day when rusty leaves swirled in a bone-chilling wind, I snipped some sage from my garden and tossed a handful of the aromatic leaves into a pot of simmering split-pea soup. The soothing, satisfying result is one I expect to recreate often, long after the holiday bird has flown from the table.

## Sage-Scented Split Pea Soup

Serves 4

- ½ medium onion, grated
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 cup split peas, rinsed
- 8 cups water
- 2 large vegetable or chicken bouillon cubes
- 8 large fresh sage leaves
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- ½ cup orzo or other small pasta
- Extra-virgin olive oil, to taste



Sauté onion in olive oil until soft. Add peas and stir to coat.

Add water, bouillon cubes, and sage; bring to a boil. Season with salt and pepper.

Lower heat; simmer for 45 minutes.

Add pasta and continue cooking until it is done, about 10 to 15 minutes.

Drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil and serve hot. (Stored soup will thicken. When reheating, add water or broth to achieve desired consistency.)

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### Bread Stuffing with Sage and Chestnuts

Makes about 6 cups (enough for a 12-pound bird)

From "How to Cook Everything" by Mark Bittman (Wiley, 2008)

½ pound (2 sticks) butter

1 cup chopped onion

½ cup dry white wine

¾-1 pound chestnuts, boiled or roasted, then shelled, skinned, and chopped

6-8 cups fresh bread crumbs

1 tablespoon minced fresh sage leaves

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

½ cup chopped scallion

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

Put the butter in a large, deep skillet or Dutch oven over medium heat. When melted, add the onion and cook, stirring, until it softens, about 5 minutes. Add the wine and chestnuts and simmer for 5 minutes.

Add the bread crumbs and sage and toss to mix. Turn the heat to low. Add the salt, pepper, and scallion. Toss again; taste and adjust the seasoning. Add the parsley and stir. Turn off the heat. (At this point, you may refrigerate the stuffing, well wrapped or in a covered container, for up to a day before proceeding.)

Pack into a chicken or turkey if you like before roasting or just bake in an ovenproof glass or enameled baking dish for about 45 minutes at 350-400 degrees F. (Or you can cook it up to 3 days in advance and just warm it up right before dinner.)

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### Arugula-Sage Pesto

From "The Herbal Kitchen" by Kami McBride (Conari Press, 2010)

¾ cups olive oil

2 ½ cups arugula

½ cup fresh parsley

¼ cup fresh sage

2 garlic cloves

¼ cup sunflower seeds

¼ cup grated Romano cheese

Dash of salt

Dash of black pepper

1. Put the olive oil, arugula, parsley, sage, and garlic into a food processor.
2. Blend until you have a smooth paste.
3. Add other ingredients a little at a time until everything is completely blended.
4. Put into a lidded jar and store in the refrigerator for up to one week.

Mary Ann Castronovo Fusco is a freelance writer and editor based in Leonia, N.J.. Her web site is [www.macfusco.com](http://www.macfusco.com).

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**Sage**

1. Monday, 22 November 2010 14:47

(*Sal runfolo*)

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Love sage. I just used 20 leaves in my tripe I made last week. Great, different flavor.

Sal

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