

Flavor Boosters



Many people use butter, oil, and salt to flavor food. But butter and oil add a lot of extra fat and calories. Most people tend to go overboard with salt, too. Instead, give the following healthy flavor boosters a try.

Fresh Herbs

Fresh herbs are flavorful and nearly calorie free. They are loaded with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Common herbs include cilantro, parsley, basil, dill, chives, tarragon, mint, oregano, and thyme.

Simple ideas:

- Add chopped dill to chicken soup.
- Brush a chicken breast with a mixture of 3 tablespoons of minced tarragon, 2 teaspoons of lemon juice, 1 tablespoon of olive oil, and a sprinkle of salt and pepper. Then bake or broil it.
- Enhance seltzer or plain water with sprigs of mint.
- Make a pizza with fresh oregano and basil. Top a thin whole wheat crust (10 inches across) with 2 cups of tomato sauce and 1½ cups of shredded, part-skim mozzarella cheese. After the pizza is baked, sprinkle it with finely chopped oregano and torn basil leaves. (Serves two.)

Citrus Fruits

A small amount of juice or peel from citrus fruits can add a ton of flavor. Use a small, sharp knife, microplane, or grater to remove the colored part of the peel (the zest). Avoid the bitter white part of the rind.

Citrus fruits are a source of vitamin C. One-half cup of citrus juice has an average of 30 calories, while the same amount of oil has 960 calories.

Simple ideas:

- Squeeze a lemon or sprinkle lemon zest over baked or grilled fish and cooked vegetables.
- Stir orange zest into yogurt or oatmeal.
- Add the juice of limes, lemons, or oranges to sparkling water for a healthy “soda.”

Dried Herbs and Spices

You can store most ground dried herbs and spices for up to six months. They last up to one year if they are whole.

Simple ideas:

- Sprinkle ground cinnamon on oatmeal.
- Add zing to chicken by sautéing or stir-frying it in curry powder.
- Toss cooked mushrooms with a teaspoon of olive oil and a few rosemary leaves.
- Add a sprinkle of oregano to pasta sauce.
- Use ½ teaspoon of ground tarragon in salad dressing.

Stocks and Broths

Stocks and broths can add flavor for about 35 calories per cup. Common stocks and broths include chicken, beef, vegetable, and fish.

Try either homemade or store-bought stocks and broths. When shopping for broths or stocks, choose those labeled “low sodium.”

Simple ideas:

- Cook rice, couscous, pasta, or grains in chicken or vegetable stock rather than water.
- Create a delicious soup by simmering vegetables in stock or broth.
- Flavor stews with beef or vegetable stock.
- Cook chicken in broth with a splash of wine, instead of using oil or fat.



Marinades

Marinades contain an acidic ingredient like wine, vinegar, or citrus juice. This acid tenderizes meat and vegetables while adding flavor. Many marinades (especially ones that contain little oil) are low in calories.

Simple ideas:

- Use a reduced-sodium teriyaki marinade for salmon, tuna, beef, and chicken.
- Try a citrus or pineapple marinade for mahi mahi, tilapia, or chicken.

Vinegar

Vinegar has a tangy, light flavor and few calories. Red wine, white wine, balsamic, and rice vinegar are common types. Remember, a small amount of vinegar goes a long way.

Simple ideas:

- Top a mozzarella and tomato salad with 1 teaspoon of balsamic vinegar.
- Make a homemade salad dressing with raspberry vinegar.
- Add 2 tablespoons of sherry vinegar to a shrimp stir-fry.

How to Marinate Meat, Chicken, and Fish

1. Place the raw meat, chicken, or fish in a sealable container. Pour the marinade evenly over the meat, chicken, or fish. Cover and seal the container.
2. Place the container in refrigerator. Marinate fish for about 30 minutes. Marinate meat or chicken from 30 minutes to several hours (or overnight).
3. For more flavor, brush the leftover marinade on the meat, chicken, or fish during cooking.
4. Discard any leftover marinade that touched raw meat, chicken, or fish. Never use this leftover marinade as a sauce for cooked items.

