

OREGANO, GREEK



Origanum vulgare hirtum
(formerly *Origanum heracleoticum*)
[or-RI-ga-num]

Family: Labiatae

Names: marjolaine sauvage (French); Dost (German); oregano (Italian); oregano (Spanish) oregano (Swedish); Lebiodka, dziki majeranek (Polish); Cunila Bulbula, Izmir Mercankosku, Nd, Origanon, Winter Marjoram; Righani (Greek)

Description: A hybrid of *Origanum vulgare* with white flowers and a spicy taste—fresh leaves numb your tongue. Oregano is a low grey-green perennial plant. The leaves are entire; the upper leaves are on short petioles, the lower leaves are on long petioles. The white flowers grow in clusters at the ends of the branches in the leaf axils. These flowers crowd together in an overlapping short head. The whole plant is aromatic and hairy. It blooms from June to August. The leaves are fuzzy,

oval and somewhat coarse in relation to the other species. The flavor is strong, austere and hotly aromatic, penetrating and slightly bitter. This is the strongest flavored 'oregano'. It is the species used for extraction of essential oils, the dried foliage having around 3% of oils, depending on growing conditions and seedling variability. The concentration of oils is so high that lengthy handling of large amounts of the dried product can cause irritation to sensitive skins. It is hardy to zone 5 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from July to September, and the seeds ripen from August to October. The scented flowers are hermaphrodite and are pollinated by bees, moths and butterflies.

Cultivation: Oregano is native to Europe and naturalized in the Middle East
Cultivation: Requires a rather dry, warm, well-drained soil in full sun, but is not fussy as to soil type, thriving on chalk. Prefers slightly alkaline conditions. Tolerates poor soils. Dislikes wet soils. Often cultivated as a culinary herb, this is a sub-species from Greece, its flowers are white and it has a stronger fragrance. It is more commonly grown commercially because of its stronger fragrance. There are some named forms. Plants growing near the sea have the most fragrance. A good companion plant, improving the flavor of nearby plants. The flowers are very attractive to bees and butterflies. A good companion for the cucumber family, it is beneficial to all nearby plants. The whole plant is strongly aromatic. Members of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer. Sow seed early spring at 50-55°F and only just cover the seed. Germination usually takes place within 2 weeks. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle and plant them out into their permanent positions in early summer. The seed can also be sown in

situ in late spring. Division in March or October. Very easy, larger divisions can be planted out direct into their permanent positions. We have found that it is better to pot up the smaller divisions and grow them on in light shade in a cold frame until they are well established before planting them out in late spring or early summer. Basal cuttings of young barren shoots in June. Very easy. Harvest the shoots with plenty of underground stem when they are about 8 - 10cm above the ground. Pot them up into individual pots and keep them in light shade in a cold frame or greenhouse until they are rooting well. Plant them out in the summer. The herb is gathered as soon as it flowers, avoiding the larger, thicker stalks

History: The name is derived from the Greek *oros*, a mountain, and *ganos*. Joy, and it is often called locally “joy of the mountains”. Much used by the ancient Greeks, oregano has had a more significant role in medicine than sweet marjoram. During the Middle Ages in Poland, oregano was believed to protect against illness and witchcraft, used to treat poisonous bites, decrease sex drive, erotomania and hysteria. The 18th century herbalist K’Eogh described oregano as having “a hot dry nature. It is good against pains of the stomach and heart and also useful for coughs, pleurisy and obstructions of the lungs and womb, and it also comforts the head and nerves.” It was said that this herb, laid with Thyme in a dairy, would prevent milk from turning during a thunderstorm.

Constituents: essential oil with thymol, carvacrol, beta-bisabolene, caryophyllene, linalool, and borneol; acids, tannins, resin, sterols, flavonoids, bitter principle. Both carvacrol and thymol are antibacterial and antifungal.

Properties: stimulant, diaphoretic, anti-microbial, expectorant, emmenagogue, rubefacient

Medicinal Uses: Oregano is a widely used herb in folk remedies and cooking. Oregano helps

to settle flatulence and stimulates the flow of bile. As a stimulating diaphoretic it is often used in the treatment of colds and flu, its use here being similar to that of hyssop. The antiseptic properties give it a use in the treatment of mouth conditions, as a mouthwash for inflammations of the mouth and throat. It is also considered to be a useful promoter of menstruation. It may also be used externally for infected cuts and wounds. The infusion is used in coughs and whooping cough. Headaches, especially when due to tension, may be relieved by a tea of marjoram or by rubbing the forehead and temples with oil. The diluted oil may also be used for rubbing into areas of muscular and rheumatic pain and for toothache. A lotion may be made which will soothe stings and bites. As with basil, it has been suggested that eating a lot of oregano can help repel mosquitoes. Oregano has many of the medicinal attributes of the other marjorams, but it also contains further essential oils which make it very much more antiseptic in action, both internally and externally.

Dosage:

Infusion: for internal use, pour a cup of boiling water onto 1 tsp of the herb and let infuse for 10-15 minutes. Drink 3 times a day

Mouthwash: this is made by pouring 1 pint of boiling water on 2 Tbsp of the herb. It is then left to stand in a covered container for 10 minutes. A gargle is made from this whenever needed by reheating it. Gargle for 5-10 minutes, 3-4 times a day

Tincture: Take 1-2ml 3 times a day

Toxicity: Do not take as a medicine during pregnancy. External use may cause irritation of the skin. Do not take essential oil internally. The oil is a dermal toxin, skin irritant, mucous membrane irritant. Avoid the oil during pregnancy.

Aromatherapy Uses:

EXTRACTION: essential oil by steam distillation from the dried flowering herb

CHARACTERISTICS: a pale yellow liquid (browning with age), with a warm, spicy-herbaceous, camphoraceous odor.

BLENDS WELL WITH: lavandin, oakmoss, pine, spike lavender, citronella, rosemary, camphor and cedarwood

ACTIONS: analgesic, anthelmintic, antirheumatic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, antitoxic, antiviral, bactericidal, carminative, choleric, cytophylactic, diaphoretic, diuretic, emmenagogue, expectorant, febrifuge, fungicidal, parasiticide, rubefacient, stimulant, tonic

CONSTITUENTS: carvacrol, thymol, cymene, caryophyllene, pinene, bisabolene, linalool, borneol, geranyl acetate, linalyl acetate, terpinene.

USES: as a fragrance component in soaps, colognes and perfumes, especially men's fragrances. Employed to some extent as a flavoring agent, mainly in meat products and pizzas

Other Uses: A red or purple dye is obtained from the flowering tops, it is neither brilliant nor durable. The plant repels ants.

Culinary Uses: Leaves are eaten fresh or cooked as a potherb. Oregano is an important flavoring herb in Mediterranean cookery, and is often used dried rather than fresh. The leaves are used as a flavoring for salad dressings, vegetables and legumes, and are frequently included in strongly flavored dishes with chilies, garlic, onions etc. An herb tea is made from the dried leaves and flowering stems. It has a strong flavor but it doesn't hold up well to prolonged cooking, especially when used fresh. Harvest fresh leaves right before you are going to use them. Wash them and pat them dry. If you are harvesting several hours ahead of time, wash them, pat them dry, and wrap in dry paper towels and refrigerate. They will keep a few hours this way.

Recipes:

Spicy Green Tomato Bread

2 ¼ cups unbleached white flour
1 ½ tsp baking powder

1 tsp baking soda
¼ tsp salt
¼ tsp ground nutmeg
1 tsp ground ginger
1 Tbsp minced fresh oregano
2 eggs
1/3 cup honey
1/3 cup melted, unsalted butter
2/3 cup apple cider
2-3 green tomatoes, diced

Preheat the oven to 325F, and butter a large loaf pan. Sift the flour, baking powder, soda, salt, nutmeg, ginger, and oregano together. In a large bowl, beat the eggs, add the honey, and beat again; then add the butter and cider, and keep beating. Stir in the tomatoes. Fold in the dry ingredients until everything is combined. Pour the batter into the greased pan, and bake about an hour, or until the top springs back when touched and the edges are pulling away from the sides of the pan. Cool on a rack for 10 minutes in the pan. Then remove from pan to cool completely on the rack. (Tomatoes Love Herbs)

Quick, Easy -N- Fast Greek Dressing

2 C. extra-virgin olive oil
½ C. red wine vinegar (see note)
1 T. Greek oregano
5 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 T. freshly ground pepper or to taste
1 ½ T. salt or to taste

In a bowl combine the olive oil, vinegar, oregano (rub the oregano between your palms to release the flavor), garlic, pepper and salt. Combine with a wire whisk until smooth. While still whisking, pour enough of the dressing over the salad to coat vegetables. Toss. Refrigerate the remaining dressing in a clean bottle or jar with a tight-fitting lid. Shake vigorously before using. Note: You can replace the wine vinegar with fresh lemon juice. Makes 3 cups.

Greek Chicken

½ oz olive oil
1 clove garlic, chopped
1 pinch Greek oregano
½ lemon, juiced

salt
white pepper
8 oz boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into
¼ inch strips
½ cup fresh mushrooms, sliced
¼ cup green onions, chopped
¼ cup white wine
1 tsp butter
¼ cup feta cheese

Sauté chicken breast I olive oil. Add garlic, oregano, lemon juice, onions, mushrooms, white wine, salt and pepper. Finish with butter. Remove from heat. Top with feta cheese (do not melt). Serve with garlic buttered linguine or rice pilaf.

Greek Roasted Potatoes

16 small Yukon Gold potatoes (or small red potatoes)
juice of 2 lemons
1 tablespoon dried Greek oregano
1 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
3 tablespoons olive oil

Heat oven to 425. Peel potatoes into egg shapes, placing them in water as you work. Drain & dry potatoes. Toss with lemon juice, oregano, salt & pepper. Pour oil into a shallow baking pan, place pan in oven until oil is hot, about 3-5 minutes. Add potatoes to pan, roast 10 minutes, then turn potatoes. Continue roasting until potatoes are browned, crisp, and tender, turning twice, about 30 minutes.

Greek Red Cabbage Salad

1 medium head red cabbage
½ medium size red onion
½ cup Greek olives (kalamata or other type)
¾ to 1 cup crumbled feta cheese
juice of one lemon or to taste
1/3 cup olive oil or to taste
1 tsp Greek oregano
salt, pepper to taste

Cut red cabbage to medium size pieces (not chunks but not like slaw either) Chop red onion finely and add to cabbage. Add lemon juice, oil, pepper, salt, and oregano, and mix

well. The cheese, and olives can either be arranged over the top or mixed in.

Gyros

1 lamb breast
2 lbs ground lamb
salt
pepper
Greek oregano
allspice, ground
paprika
basil, minced

Grind the lamb yourself. Ordinary ground lamb from the store has too much fat for this. The lamb should be coarsely ground. Mix the spices into the lamb and shape the lamb into thick patties. Slice a very thin slice of fat off the lamb breast and place it between two patties. Continue stacking patties and slices of fat until you have assembled a cylinder. Place on a grill, as far from the coals as possible and grill, turning to cook on all sides. When it is cooked, cut thin slices down the sides and serve on pita bread with tzatziki sauce, lettuce and tomatoes.

Pan-fried wrinkled black olives with onions, oregano and garlic

¼ cup extra-virgin Greek olive oil
1/2 pound wrinkled black olives, preferably Greek throumbes
1 large red onion, peeled, halved and cut into thin half-moon slices (about 3 cups)
1 garlic clove, peeled and minced
1 teaspoon Greek oregano
2 tablespoons strong red-wine vinegar
2 small hard-boiled eggs, peeled and quartered
3 radishes, trimmed and sliced into 1/8-inch rounds
1 Belgian endive or radicchio, trimmed and cut into 1/4-inch strips

Heat the olive oil in a large, heavy skillet and add the olives. Sauté over medium-high heat for about three minutes, turning with a wooden spoon. Add the onions and sauté all together, stirring frequently, for about seven minutes. Add the garlic, reduce heat to medium-low and continue cooking until the onions are very soft and very lightly browned.

Mix in 1/2 teaspoon oregano and the vinegar. As soon as the vinegar sizzles, remove the skillet from the heat. Remove the fried olives and onions with a slotted spoon and reserve the pan liquids. Place the olive and onion mixture in the center of a serving bowl, with the Belgian endive or radicchio leaves all around it. Place the hard boiled eggs and radishes decoratively around the plate. Pour over pan juices, season greens to taste with salt and sprinkle the whole plate with remaining oregano.

Stuffed Chicken Breasts, Greek-Style

(makes 4 servings)

4 5-oz boneless, skinless chicken breast halves
4 water-packed canned artichoke hearts, minced
1/4 cup minced onion
1 tsp crushed dried Greek oregano
salt
freshly ground pepper
1 Tbsp olive oil
1 cup fat-free, no-salt-added canned chicken broth
1/4 cup + 1 1/2 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
4 slices lemon
2 tsp cornstarch
parsley to garnish

Remove all visible fat from chicken, rinse and pat dry. Place halves between 2 pieces of plastic wrap and pound with the flat side of a meat mallet until the chicken is very thin and flat. Meanwhile, combine artichoke hearts, onion, and oregano. Season chicken with salt (if using) and pepper to taste. Spoon equal amounts of the artichoke mixture into the center of each pounded chicken breast to form a log. Roll up. If desired, secure with a toothpick. Heat oil in a nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add chicken and brown evenly on all sides. If some of the stuffing drops out, don't despair. It will flavor the sauce. Pour on broth and lemon juice. Top chicken with lemon slices, cover and simmer until chicken is cooked through, about 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer chicken to 4 serving plates, discarding toothpick (if used). Keep warm. Using a fork, mix cornstarch with the remaining 1 1/2

tablespoons (22.5 ml) lemon juice. Add to skillet and stir over high heat until slightly thickened. Spoon on lemon sauce; garnish with the cooked lemon slices and parsley.

Eggplant Parmagian

2 28 fl.oz. cans crushed organic tomatoes
3 Tbs. organic dry basil
1 Tbs. dry Greek oregano
1 medium onion, diced
1/2 bulb (3 to 6 cloves) fresh organic garlic, crushed or minced
3-4 Tbs organic extra virgin olive oil
2 tsp. fine grey sea salt
1 lb. mozzarella cheese
2/3 cup parmagian cheese
2 medium Italian eggplants

Make the tomato sauce: Sautee onions in oil until soft and translucent. Add tomatoes, garlic, herbs and sea salt. Cook on medium heat for 45 minutes until thick and flavors are well blended. Stir occasionally. Variations: A: Add 1/4 cup diced celery. B: add 1/2 cup mixed chopped greens. (spinach, rapini). C: To make the sauce more spicy, add 1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper.

Pre-bake the eggplant: Cut whole eggplant in 1/2 " thick slices. Brush each eggplant slice with olive oil on both sides and place flat on a metal baking tray. Bake in 350 degree oven for 15 to 20 minutes until soft. Grate the cheeses in 2 separate bowls. Assemble the dish: In a stainless steel baking dish, (14" X 10" X 2" deep) layer tomato sauce, eggplant rounds, tomato sauce, cheeses, eggplant rounds, tomato sauce, cheeses. Leave at least 1/2" of empty space in the baking dish above the top layer. 5. Bake at 350 degrees for 1/2 hour. The cheese will melt and bubble. Yields 8 portions.

Marinated Trout with Greek Oregano Flowers

8 trout fillets, or 2 whole trout with head and tails removed
Marinade
1/2 pint dry white wine
4 Tbsp Greek oregano flower vinegar
1 shallot

1 carrot
1 clove of garlic
1 bay leaf
6 black peppercorns
3 sprig parsley
2 sprigs Greek oregano

Sour Cream Sauce

6 Tbsp sour cream or crème fraiche
pinch of dry mustard
freshly ground black pepper
sea salt

2 Tbsp oregano flowers

Place the trout in a lidded frying pan or ovenproof dish. Put all the ingredients for the marinade into a small saucepan and bring to the boil. Simmer for 20 minutes and then pour over the trout. Simmer for a further 10 minutes and then leave the fish to cool in the marinade. When cool, remove the trout, strain the remaining marinade and reserve for the sauce. If using whole fish, skin and bone and cut into eight fillets. Arrange in a shallow serving dish. Put the sour cream in a bowl and mix it with a pinch of mustard and two tablespoons of the strained marinade. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Beat until smooth and pour over the fillets. Finally scatter the two tablespoons of oregano flowers over the fillets in the sauce. (Good Enough to Eat)

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