

.. and another thing

You could probably use a little spice in your life.

A recent U.S. Department of Agriculture study measured the phenolic content and antioxidant activity of 27 culinary herbs and 12 medicinal herbs under laboratory conditions. The medicinal herbs fared well; familiar names like periwinkle, ginkgo biloba, garden sage, St. John's Wort, valerian, and sweet Annie all showed significant antioxidant content.

But the fresh culinary herbs blew them away. And guess which was the leader of the pack? Plain old oregano.

Oregano was found to have 42 times more antioxidants than apples, 30 times more than potatoes, 12 times more than oranges, and 4 times more than blueberries! That means that one tablespoon of fresh oregano has the same free-radical fighting power as one medium-sized apple.

Overall, oregano had 3 to 20 times more antioxidant content than the other herbs tested. The other good herb antioxidant sources included dill, thyme, rosemary, and peppermint.

But the dried herbs didn't quite cut it.

According to the study's authors, fresh herbs are the best choice, as some of the antioxidant concentration is lost in processing.

Most grocery stores now carry a wide variety of fresh herbs, and it's easy to work them into familiar recipes. As a general rule, if a recipe calls for one teaspoon of a dried herb, you can substitute one TABLEspoon of chopped fresh herb in its place for the same taste. Fresh herbs should stay good in your refrigerator for up to five days if stored properly; cooking experts recommend wrapping them in a damp paper towel and sealing in an airtight plastic bag.

Of course, you still need to eat your fruits and veggies; these foods offer a wide range of other beneficial phytochemicals, plus vitamins, minerals, and fiber that are essential to good health. But now we know that fresh herbs can help add even more antioxidant power into our lives, while adding great taste, too.

So, mangiare! Eat up! And pass the oregano.

To Your Good Health, and... Go Ravens!

Jenny Thompson