

## Herbal Dressings & Marinades

### Acid Component:

Choosing your “acid” component (vinegars, lime/lemon juice, yogurt/buttermilk/etc) will vary depending on application and personal preferences. Experimenting is the only way to know which of these options you like in different applications! Go out and buy something you haven’t used in your kitchen before... try something new and figure out your favorites!

Ranking vinegars from mild to robust:

1. **Rice Vinegar** (Mild & Delicate) - *Slightly sweet and very mild* - Great for light salads, Asian dressings, or quick-pickling vegetables. It's a perfect base for delicate herbs like mint or basil.
2. **Champagne Vinegar** (Mild & Subtle) - *Light, fruity, and mellow, with a slight hint of acidity* - Ideal for vinaigrettes, light sauces, and dishes where you don't want to overpower the ingredients. Pairs well with tarragon or chives.
3. **White Wine Vinegar** (Mild to Moderate) - *Tangy, slightly fruity, and versatile* - Good for herb-infused vinegars (fines herbes), salad dressings, and marinades. Works well with most herbs, including rosemary, thyme, or dill.
4. **Apple Cider Vinegar** (Moderate & Fruity) - *Tangy and fruity with a mild apple flavor, slightly sweet* - Works well for heartier salads, marinades, and infused vinegars with stronger herbs like oregano or sage. A popular choice for wellness drinks too.
5. **Sherry Vinegar** (Moderate to Bold) - *Slightly nutty, complex, with a smooth but assertive tang* - Ideal for richer sauces, marinades for meats, and even deglazing. It complements stronger herbs like thyme or bay leaf.
6. **Red Wine Vinegar** (Moderate to Bold) - *Strong, tangy, and slightly fruity with a deeper intensity* - Great for heartier marinades, robust salad dressings, or dishes with red meat. It pairs well with rosemary, oregano, and garlic.
7. **Balsamic Vinegar** (Bold & Sweet) - *Sweet, syrupy, and complex, with a pronounced depth and a slight acidic kick (sweetness can vary a lot by brand)* - Fantastic for drizzling on roasted vegetables, meats, and for rich salad dressings. Balsamic pairs well with thyme, basil, and even fruits.
8. **Malt Vinegar** (Robust, Bold & Earthy) - *Strong, malty, with a distinct earthy acidity* - Known for pairing with fish and chips, it's also good in marinades for heartier meats like pork or beef. It's less common for herb infusions due to its intense flavor.

**Lime & Lemon Juice:** Lime and lemon juice, while not vinegars, are acidic and can be used in a similar way in dressings and marinades. Here's how they compare to vinegars:

- **Lemon Juice:** Fresh, bright, and slightly sour with a citrusy fragrance.
- **Lime Juice:** Tangy and sharp, with a more intense acidity and citrus flavor than lemon j

Lemon and lime juice have an acidity level (pH around 2.0-2.5) that's similar to many vinegars (which range from pH 2.5-3.5), but the flavor profile is different due to the lack of fermented depth that vinegars have.

**OTHER:** Wine or Yogurt (buttermilk, kefir, etc) can be used as your acid component.

## Marinades:

Marinate meats or vegetables to infuse with flavor before cooking.

### Basics of a marinade:

- Oil (I like to use olive oil)
- Acid (see previous section on acids - if using yogurt to marinate, skip oil)
- Flavorings
  - Salt & pepper (for meats: rule of thumb is 1 tsp per lb of meat) (you can also use soy sauce for all or part of your salt component)
  - Dijon mustard
  - Herbs
  - Optional
    - Crushed garlic (this is a must for me!) (no time? Use garlic powder and/or some onion powder)
    - sweeten with honey, maple syrup, brown sugar, molasses, etc - depending on personal taste, this might be needed to balance the acidity
    - add pepper flakes, ginger, cumin, paprika, etc depending on flavor profile you're going after

### Notes:

- Always use a non-reactive container (glass, ceramic, resealable plastic bag). Avoid metal as acidic ingredients can react with it, affecting both flavor and safety.
- Fully submerge the food (My favorite is a resealable bag -make sure excess air is out of bag.)
- Always marinate in the refrigerator to keep the food safe from bacterial growth.
- Marinating time is important - too much time in a marinade can lead to over-tenderizing, resulting in mushy or tough textures:
  - **Delicate Proteins (fish, shrimp, tofu):** Marinate for **15-30 minutes**. These foods are more susceptible to becoming mushy if left too long in acidic marinades.
  - **Poultry (chicken, turkey):** **2-4 hours** is usually sufficient to impart flavor without over-marinating.
  - **Red Meat (beef, lamb):** You can marinate for **4-24 hours**. Longer marinating times are best for tougher cuts.
  - **Vegetables:** Marinate vegetables for **30 minutes to 2 hours**, depending on their firmness. Softer vegetables like zucchini may require less time, while heartier ones like root vegetables can take longer.
- Flip (and massage a bit if in a bag) halfway through the marinating time.
- Matching the marinade to the food:
  - **Citrus-based marinades** are ideal for fish, shrimp, and chicken, giving them a bright, fresh flavor.
  - **Vinegar-based marinades** work well for tougher cuts of beef, lamb, or pork, as the acidity breaks down the fibers to make the meat more tender.
  - **Herb- and oil-based marinades** without much acid are perfect for vegetables or delicate proteins like tofu, where the focus is on adding flavor rather than breaking down the structure.
- If searing or browning is important, pat the food dry before cooking.
- Tofu can be marinated after cooking instead of before.

## Dressings

**Bases for Creamy Dressings:** Use any combination of these - I've found that mixing a couple things makes for a more interesting dressing.

Mayonnaise	Sour Cream	Greek Yogurt or Yogurt
Kefir	Buttermilk	Chevre (great to help thicken!)

### **Creamy Herb Dressing (general):**

- Choose your creamy bases \*see above
- Finely Chopped Herbs
- Optional: citrus juice or vinegar (just a splash if using in creamy dressing)
- Optional: garlic or onion powder
- Optional: dijon mustard
- Optional: a soft cheese like feta or chevre, blue cheese, grated parmesan or pecorino...
- Salt & Pepper to taste

*If making without blender:*

- In a medium bowl, whisk together creamy ingredients until smooth.
- If using citrus juice or vinegar, add it now and whisk in.
- Stir in all other ingredients
- Taste and adjust.
- Refrigerate at least 30 minutes to allow flavors to meld.
- Keeps in fridge about a week.

*If using a blender:* Throw everything in and blend. Taste & adjust. Refrigerate. (My smoothie blender works great for this and has a perfect size container for dressing.)

### **Creamy Herb Dressing (Ranch-Style)**

Use this as inspiration!! You can use different creamy components or vary anything!

- 1/2 cup **mayonnaise**
  - 1/4 cup **sour cream** or **Greek yogurt**
  - 2 tablespoons **milk** or **buttermilk** (adjust for desired consistency)
  - 1 tablespoon **lemon juice** or **apple cider vinegar**
  - 1 tablespoon **fresh parsley**, finely chopped
  - 1 tablespoon **fresh chives**, finely chopped
  - 1/2 tablespoon **dill** or **tarragon**, finely chopped
  - 1/2 teaspoon **garlic powder**
  - 1/2 teaspoon **onion powder**
  - Salt and pepper to taste
- In a medium bowl, whisk creamy ingredients together until smooth
  - Add lemon juice or vinegar and whisk until smooth
  - Stir in remaining ingredients
  - Taste & adjust
  - Refrigerate at least 30 minutes to allow flavors to meld
  - Keep in fridge about a week.

### **Basic Herb Vinaigrette:**

- 2 parts extra virgin olive oil (¼ Cup)
- 1 part vinegar (apple cider, white wine or red wine, or...) (2 TBS)
- Dijon mustard (optional for flavor & keeps dressing emulsified) (1 tsp)
- Salt & pepper to taste (yes, it needs salt) a shake or 2
- Chopped herbs \* (parsley, basil, tarragon, whatever u have) 1 TBS
- Optional honey or maple syrup (to balance acid) 1 tsp
- Optional crushed garlic, or minced shallot

- In a small jar, add oil and vinegar to correct ratios (in a jar, you should be able to hold up and look at the side to see if there is about 2x as much oil as vinegar). Yes, get used to making your vinaigrette without dirtying a bunch of measuring things, and of course, you can *adjust the vinegar/oil ratio to suit your taste preferences!*
- Add remainder of ingredients and whisk together. (I used to just lid the jar and give it a really brisk shake but found that whisking it really does emulsify it better - fork is fine.)
- Taste, and adjust.
- Serve immediately or store in refrigerator for a week. Give it a good shake before each use.
  - \* You can use dried herbs instead of fresh - but use smaller quantity and best if it sits for 30 min to 1 hour before serving.