**Oregano Presentation**

**I. What is Oregano?**

A. Oregano is a perennial herb in mild climates and an annual in colder climates. It grows up to 2 feet in height with relatively small leaves and little white, pink, or purple flowers that may also be eaten.

B. Oregano is part of the Lamiaceae family, shared with the other herbs marjoram, basil, mint, rosemary, sage, and lavender. It is often referred to as wild marjoram.

 C. It is used as a culinary spice and food preservative.

 D. There are several varieties of oregano. Many are in the Lamiaceae family described above, but oregano is really a flavor rather than a particular plant, so oregano can be from different families or genera. The dried oregano sold on spice racks in stores is usually made up of several varieties.

**II. History of Oregano**

A. Oregano was first used by the Greeks as both a food seasoning and for medicinal purposes. Greek mythology says it was invented by the goddess Aphrodite.

 B. The word “oregano” is derived from the Greek phrase “joy of the mountains.”

 C. When the Romans conquered the Greeks, they spread the use of oregano throughout Europe and Northern Africa, where it eventually made its way through the Middle East into China.

 D. Oregano became very popular and widely used in Europe during the Middle Ages.

 E. Oregano was little known in the U.S. before WWII. Soldiers that had been in Italy came home and raved about the herb.

 F. Oregano is commercially used to scent soaps, lotions, perfumes, cleaning products, etc.

**III. Nutrition and Health Benefits of Oregano**

A. Oregano is an antiseptic. The active ingredients in oregano oils that perform this function are *thymol* and *carvacrol*.

 B. Oregano is a rich source of antioxidants, and is high in fiber. It has vitamins K and E, iron, manganese, and calcium. However, oregano is eaten in such small amounts, that it is not considered a good source for most nutrients.

 C. Because oregano is so flavorful, it helps reduce the need for sodium and sugar in cooking.

 D. Oil of oregano is used for medicinal purposes, notably getting rid of intestinal parasites. Other uses still awaiting scientific consensus are for: asthma, cough, and bronchitis (oregano is believed to have anti-spasm properties), indigestion and bloating (it is believed to increase flow of bile) and fighting against some bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other parasites.

 E. Safe medicinal amounts of oil of oregano are unknown. A possible side effect is upset stomach. The only fully researched dosage is for intestinal parasites: 200 mg of oil of oregano three times daily for 6 weeks.

 F. Current research in Mexico shows that it is just as effective or moreso than prescription drugs in getting rid of the common parasitic infection *Giarda*.

 G. Avoid oregano supplements if you’re taking Lithium, as oregano may inhibit the body’s ability to get rid of lithium. Using oregano moderately as a spice in cooking should not interfere with lithium removal.

**IV. Selection, Preparation and Storage of Oregano**

A. When purchasing fresh oregano, look for bright, unblemished bunches. Store in a plastic bag filled with air and place in the crisper of the refrigerator, or in an herb saver. You can also wrap them in a damp paper towel, or you can also place the stems in water like flowers in a vase, and place in the refrigerator.

 B. Freeze oregano in an air-tight container, whole or chopped. Place in ice cube trays and cover with water or broth to add later to soups.

 C. Oregano can be dried using a dehydrator or hung upside down in bunches in a cool dark place with good ventilation. Once thoroughly dried, store in air-tight containers. It will retain its peak flavor for about 6 months and then slowly deteriorate. However, it will retain flavor and remain edible for several years.

 D. Dried oregano is a savory spice not usually used in sweet dishes, and is associated with Italian food.

 E. Oregano’s flavor is much stronger dried than fresh. You may need to use up to 3 times as much fresh oregano as dried to achieve the same flavor intensity.

 F. Add oregano towards the end of the cooking process to retain the most flavor. Oregano can be infused in olive oil, added to salad dressings, veggies, and breads, and used in many dishes of Italian and Mexican origin.

**V. Fun Facts**

A. Just married couples in Ancient Greece wore wreaths of oregano; they also placed it on graves to give peace to the departed spirits.

 B. The Ancient Greeks also believed that if you anoint yourself with oregano you will dream about your future spouse.

 C. It is said to encourage good luck and good health.

 D. It was used by Swedish mountain peasants in their ale to give it a more intoxicating quality and prevent the ale from turning sour.

 E. Biblical authorities believe the plant “hyssop” referred to in the Bible is oregano.

 F. Oregano was used medicinally before use as a seasoning: From *Gerard's Herbal* (1545-1612-English):"Organy cureth them that have been poisoned by drinking Opium, or the juice of Black Poppy or Hemlock, especially if it be given with Wine and Raisons of the Sunne".

**VI. Activity Ideas**

A. Bring oregano seeds, small containers with soil (or bring soil separate) and plant oregano, so participants can start a seedling indoors and replant in an indoor or outdoor herb garden.

 B. Taste test recipes; a recipe with fresh vs. dried oregano.

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