

Seasonings

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Fresh herbs are the cream of the crop in Britain's kitchens

Latest research from MINTEL shows that Brits have gone blooming mad for fresh herbs. Sales have blossomed by more than 50% in the last five years alone, to reach an impressive £46 million this year.

"Fresh herbs are flourishing, not least because they fit in with the trend towards using fresh and natural produce. They are also good for you, they season without adding calories and are often seen as a key ingredient in good quality recipes," comments Katy Child, senior analyst at MINTEL.

MINTEL's exclusive consumer research shows that over two in five (42%) Brits have recently bought fresh herbs and almost a third (29%) believe it is worth paying more for them. But most impressive of all is that as many as one in five (22%) Brits are exercising their green fingers and are growing their own fresh herbs at home, a trend which Jamie Oliver has heavily promoted in his new "Jamie at Home" television series.

"As a nation we are becoming more aware of the origins and content of our food. We are particularly concerned about the pitfalls of hidden ingredients, which has led to the growing popularity in cooking from scratch and using fresh ingredients like herbs. There is no doubt, that the market has also benefited from celebrity chefs, such as Jamie Oliver championing the benefits of buying British and even growing your own produce," adds Katy Child.

Although dried herb sales (which includes spices, meat seasonings and frozen herbs) are considerably higher than fresh at £73 million this year, growth has been much slower at just 14% between 2002 and 2007. Good thyme(s) ahead?

Looking to the future, the fresh herbs market is forecast to rise by a further 55% by 2012, to hit £72 million. Although this growth is impressive, if consumers became more confident when cooking with fresh herbs we could see even more spectacular sales growth. Meanwhile, dried herbs are set to see just 12% growth over the same period, to reach £82 million.

"Despite the growing interest in using fresh herbs, it seems many of us still lack the knowledge and confidence to use them extensively. Budding chefs are often scared of bad results and wastage because they are confused about which herbs to use and how much. Educating consumers about how to use fresh herbs in cooking could grow the market further and help encourage more people to give them a go," comments Katy Child.