



**Origano** Its name says it all: “splendor of the mountain,” from the ancient Greek *oros*, or “mountain,” and *ganos*, or “splendor.” This rather inconspicuous mountain herb ignites a veritable explosion on the palate. Perfect with tomatoes, oregano is also great with meat, eggs, and any kind of pastry. It is also thought to ward off evil spirits when burned as incense. Its close relative, marjoram, is a little milder and sweeter. Its verdant sprigs adorned brides and grooms in ancient times, and it was thought to help with speech disorders during the Middle Ages. Today it supplies flavor for stews, frittatas, and all kinds of meats.



**Peperoncino** These fruity, spicy pods from South America arrived in Calabria in the 16th century, and initially dubbed Pepe d’India, peppers from India. They quickly gained popularity in southern Italy as a preservative, a role still evident in the recipes for *nduja* and *salame spianata*. Mainly cultivated in Calabria and Basilicata, their hot flavor spices up dishes such as *Aglio, Olio, e Peperoncino* and *Spaghetti all’Arrabiata*. These chiles are also pressed with olives, with the resulting spicy oil used to flavor pizza, pasta, and risotto, and in Sicily, it even finds its way into chocolate, offering a spicy twist.



**Prezzemolo** While the curly variety is mainly used north of the Alps, in Italy people prefer the much more flavorful

flat-leaf parsley variety. Raw, or only briefly heated, it is used in mushroom dishes or soups in northern Italy, while it dresses up fish and seafood in southern Italy. Above all, however, parsley is absolutely essential for *gremolata*, the magic ingredient of authentic Italian cuisine. This herb adds a bright, fresh flavor that elevates any dish; from simple pasta sauces to complex meat braises.



**Rosmarino** Rosemary, the “dew of the sea,” was not only used for cooking in the past, it was also part of numerous cultural ceremonies. Its fragrance is indeed beguiling. The thin, needle-shaped leaves develop their flavor particularly well in grilling and cooking. Rosemary is an integral part of numerous hearty dishes with meat, fish, eggplant, and zucchini, and a proper focaccia would not dare be seen without it.



**Zafferano** This precious spice (and pigment) is extracted from the stigmas of the crocus flower. Saffron is harvested entirely by hand in an extremely arduous process, as it only blooms once a year for a few weeks in the fall. This scarcity has rendered saffron the most expensive of spices since ancient times. Its intense golden yellow color mainly comes from the crocin it contains, while its aromatic fragrance is rather delicate, which is why saffron should not be cooked very long. However, it is a must in authentic Milanese risotto. The best saffron comes from Aquila DOC, where it is only harvested

by hand at dawn between mid-October and November 1st, or from Sardinia (DOC), where it has the highest crocin content. Both make an excellent investment, and are sure to add a touch of luxury to any dish.



**Salvia** The healing powers of sage are reflected in its name, which comes from the Latin *salvare*, meaning “to heal.” This is precisely why the Romans considered sage sacred. Today, this herb is ubiquitous. It is boiled, fried, and baked, it accompanies meat, gnocchi, stuffed pasta, and many other rather heavier dishes. After all, sage aids in digestion, and its earthy, slightly peppery flavor makes it a culinary chameleon.



**Timo** Thyme with its silvery-green leaves is not only popular among physicians; chefs love it too. Its distinctive flavor complements meat and fish dishes, as well as casseroles, pasta, and risottos. The entire plant contains essential oils that provide its taste and effect, but only the leaves can be used for seasoning. The stem of the thyme sprig contains numerous bitter substances that can ruin many an authentic dish.

Italy’s herbs not only add the finishing touch to refined dishes, they are also essential ingredients in many basic recipes of the following pages ...

