

# Herbs and Garlic-in-Oil Mixtures: Safe Handling Practices for Consumers<sup>1</sup>

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Herbs and garlic-in-oil mixtures are potentially hazardous food items. The Food and Drug Administration issued an order to manufacturers instructing them to discontinue production of herbs and garlic-in-oil products that require refrigeration as the only safety precaution.

If not handled properly, herbs and garlic-in-oil mixtures can support growth of *Clostridium botulinum*, a bacterium that causes botulism. These bacteria are widespread in nature, but seldom cause problems because they can't grow when oxygen is present.

Garlic-in-oil provides an ideal environment for *Clostridium botulinum*, especially when the product has been stored at a temperature high enough for the bacteria to grow. When *Clostridium botulinum* grow in the contaminated garlic in oil, the deadly toxin can be released into the mixture. Once the bacteria start to grow, refrigerating the product slows down but does not stop the production of *botulinum* toxin.

To reduce potential risk, this product must be handled properly. Here are steps that you can take to reduce your risk of botulism from garlic-in-oil mixtures.

## Where You Shop:

Garlic-in-oil should be stored in the refrigerated section.

Read the label to determine if the garlic-in-oil product contains salt, phosphoric acid or citric acid. These are preservatives, that promote product safety.



Figure 1. Olive oil.  
Credits: iStock

If salt or acids are listed in the ingredient statement, the product has been preserved. You have lower risk of food poisoning **as long as you follow directions for storing the product.**

## At Home:

Refrigerate garlic-in-oil mixtures promptly.

Leftover garlic-in-oil should be discarded after two hours at room temperature, even if salt and acid(s) are present .

Read the label and use the product as recommended by the manufacturer.

1. This document is FCS8743, one of a series of the Department of Family Youth and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 2002. Revised October 2006 and December 2010. Reviewed November 2013. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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Garlic-in-oil is a safe product when you make it at home and use it right away. It's also safe if you keep it refrigerated, and use it within a 2-3 days.

## **During Preparation:**

Wash hands with hot soapy water before and after:

- handling fresh produce
- handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
- using the bathroom
- changing diapers
- handling pets

Use a cooler with ice or ice gel packs when you take perishable foods outdoors. This includes garlic-in-oil.

Sanitize kitchen sink frequently to prevent a build up of microbes. Counter tops can be sanitized by using the solution mix described below, sanitizing sprays or wipes after they are washed with soap and water for an additional safety measure.

## **Sanitizing Solution:**

To sanitize cutting boards, dishes, and utensils:

Mix one teaspoon chlorine bleach in one quart water.

Pour the mixture onto surface and let sit at least one minute.

Rinse well with hot running water.

Following these steps will help reduce your risk of food-borne illness from garlic-in-oil mixtures.

## **For More Information:**

You can visit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website at: <http://www.fda.gov> or call FDA Consumer Inquiries at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (a toll-free number).