

the promotion of 'fresh' vs. 'packaged' produce. Consumers can smell and touch the herbs, and it's the least expensive presentation by unit. It's the most perishable presentation option, though, lasting three to five hours on a wet rack. Since there's no information printed on twist ties, it's more difficult for the consumer to distinguish fresh herb varieties," says Greenbush.

Quail Mountain Herbs, growers in Watsonville, CA, also provides herbs in open bunches, with a hard label that's easy to read. Co-owner Kirk Schmidt says, "Retailers are very creative with bunches — some put them in aluminum bread pans, others in the plastic six-packs used for seedlings. Ideally, bunches should be put in the cold rack with the cut stems, but not the leaves, in water.

"We provide a laminated card to post in the storage area with instructions for handling printed in Spanish and English. We tell the retailer the ideal place for fresh herbs is in a cool, dry place, but that it's best not to mist them," continues Schmidt. "The biggest single problem with herbs is that often the cold rack isn't cold enough: the retailer thinks it's 45, when it's really 72 degrees.

"We suggest to the retailer that fresh herbs be positioned between spinach and mushrooms in a rack about one foot wide. The retailer gets good sales there."

"We also make sure the retailer knows that

basil can't be exposed to the same degree of coldness as other herbs. Other herbs do well at temperatures between 45-55, but if basil is exposed to a temperature much below, 55, it'll turn black," warns Schmidt.

Positioning Key To Herb Success

Martin Certa, produce manager for Gelson's Stores, Encino, CA, says. "In Gelson's, fresh herbs are displayed on a refrigerated unit next to fresh corn. Sales are very good: We carry 14 varieties of fresh herbs in all eight stores, and we get daily delivery."

Bill Georgaqui, co-owner of Sunerbs, Winthrop, MA, co-manufacturers herbs packed in jars filled with sunflower oil within four hours after they have been harvested in Provence, in southern France. The sunflower oil acts as a preservative, without altering the flavor of the herbs. "We suggest that the jars be displayed in the produce area, and refrigerated," says Georgaqui. "They don't really need to be refrigerated, but it lends an aura of freshness.

"We provide the retailer with a brochure called, "Fresh Herb Know-How," says Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's, Inc., Los Angeles. "The brochure gives recipes, other suggestions for usage, and directions on care for potted plants. For maximum sales, we suggest that potted plants should be placed near tomatoes. They seem to sell best there, perhaps because the green and red complement each other. And, of

course, potted plants shouldn't be refrigerated.

"Fresh cut herbs in the zip-lock bags tend to sell best when placed with salad greens," adds Caplan. "The smart retailer advertises periodically to let shoppers know he carries fresh herbs."

At Dominick's Finer Foods, Northlake, IL, all 86 stores carry both fresh cut and potted herbs. "The fresh cut herbs in sealed bags sell well when displayed in a rack that adheres to the mirrors over the lettuce and other salad greens," says produce buyer Al Lenke. "And we designed a free-standing rack specially for potted herbs. The racks fit in wherever there's room on the floor in the department."

Providing Information To Consumers

"Our zip-lock bags offer a recipe and suggested uses," says Caplan, "But the potted herbs only have room for suggested uses."

"Our herbs come in a jar with a neckband printed with suggested uses, and there's a toll-free number to call for recipes. There's no barrier between the consumer and our company," says Sunerbs' Georgaqui.

"Occasionally, we'll print our own recipes, usually to coincide with a print ad" says Dominick's Lenke. "We also provide suggested uses on the packages, and the pots have a little insert. All Dominick's stores have a continuously running VCR, and sometimes we feature an herb video."