

Prep Time: 10 minutes
Infusing Time: 30 minutes (minimum)
Total Time: 40 minutes
Servings: 4-6
Calories: ~190 kcal per serving

Table of Contents

- ◆
- [Why This Recipe Works](#)
- [Ingredients](#)
- [Equipment](#)
- [Instructions](#)
 - [Part 1: Toasting the Spices \(The Flavor Foundation\)](#)
 - [Part 2: Assembling the Dipping Oil](#)
 - [Part 3: The Infusion & Serving](#)
- [Recipe Notes & Variations](#)
- [Nutrition Information](#)

Why This Recipe Works

- **Layering Flavors:** We don't just dump herbs into oil. We start by gently toasting the dried herbs and spices in a pan. This quick step awakens their essential oils, resulting in a far more fragrant and potent dip.
- **The Perfect Balance:** A splash of balsamic vinegar and a squeeze of fresh lemon juice are non-negotiable. The acidity cuts through the richness of the oil and brightens all the other flavors, preventing the dip from tasting flat or greasy.

- **Fresh Meets Dried:** We use a combination of dried herbs for their concentrated flavor and fresh garlic and parsley for a pungent, vibrant kick.
 - **Quality Matters:** Since olive oil is the star, using a good-quality extra virgin olive oil is key. You want one that tastes peppery and fruity, not bland.
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Ingredients

- For the Spice Blend:
 - 1 teaspoon dried oregano
 - 1 teaspoon dried basil
 - 1 teaspoon dried thyme
 - ½ teaspoon dried rosemary, finely crushed
 - ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes (adjust to your preferred heat level)
 - ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
 - ¼ teaspoon onion powder

- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper
- For the Dipping Oil:
 - 1 cup high-quality extra virgin olive oil
 - 2 cloves garlic, very thinly sliced or finely minced
 - 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, finely chopped
 - 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
 - 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
 - 2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan or Pecorino Romano cheese (optional, but highly recommended)
- For Serving:
 - 1 loaf of crusty bread (such as a rustic Italian loaf, ciabatta, or a French baguette), sliced
 - A shallow bowl or a small rimmed plate

Equipment

- Small skillet or saucepan
- Measuring spoons
- A small bowl or shallow dish
- Whisk or fork
- Bread knife
- Cutting board

Instructions

Part 1: Toasting the Spices (The Flavor Foundation)

1. Combine Dry Ingredients: In a small bowl, combine the dried oregano, basil, thyme, crushed rosemary, red pepper flakes, garlic powder, onion powder, kosher salt, and black pepper.

2. Gently Toast: Place a small, dry skillet over medium-low heat. Add the entire spice blend to the pan. Toast for 1-2 minutes, stirring constantly with a spatula. You are not trying to cook the spices, but rather to warm them until they become incredibly fragrant. Be careful not to burn them, as this will make the entire dip bitter. As soon as you can smell their aroma, immediately remove the pan from the heat.
3. Cool Slightly: Transfer the toasted spices to your serving bowl and let them cool for a minute. This prevents them from scorching the garlic later.

Part 2: Assembling the Dipping Oil

1. Add the Aromatics: To the bowl with the cooled, toasted spices, add the thinly sliced garlic, fresh parsley, balsamic vinegar, and fresh lemon juice.
2. Add the Olive Oil: Pour the extra virgin olive oil over the mixture. Using a whisk or a fork, gently stir everything together until well combined. The oil will look slightly cloudy from the spices and vinegar—this is exactly what you want.
3. Add the Cheese (If Using): If you're using the Parmesan or Pecorino Romano, gently stir it in. It will add a wonderful salty, umami-rich depth to the oil.

Part 3: The Infusion & Serving

1. Let it Infuse (Crucial Step): This is the most important step for flavor development. Cover the bowl loosely with a plate or plastic wrap and let it sit at room temperature for at least 30 minutes. This allows the dried herbs to rehydrate and release their full flavor into the oil, and the garlic to mellow and infuse.

2. Prepare the Bread: While the oil is infusing, slice your crusty bread into thick, hearty slices. For an extra touch of luxury, lightly toast or grill the bread slices. This provides a warm, crisp contrast to the cool, rich oil.
 3. Serve: Give the dipping oil one final stir, as the spices and cheese will have settled at the bottom. Serve it in a shallow bowl or a small rimmed plate, alongside the sliced bread.
 4. To Enjoy: Dip a piece of bread into the oil, making sure to scoop up some of the flavorful herbs, garlic, and cheese from the bottom. Savor immediately.
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Recipe Notes & Variations

- The Garlic Dilemma: Fresh garlic is a must for the best flavor. However, for food safety, if you plan to store this oil for more than a few hours, you should remove the garlic. For a make-ahead version, you can infuse the oil with garlic cloves and then strain them out before serving. For immediate consumption (within a day), the garlic is perfectly safe to leave in.
- Herb It Up: Feel free to experiment with other herbs. A pinch of Herbs de Provence or a few finely chopped sun-dried tomatoes can be wonderful additions.
- Spice It Up: If you love heat, increase the red pepper flakes or add a pinch of cayenne pepper to the spice blend.
- The Cheese Factor: For a dairy-free version, simply omit the Parmesan cheese. The oil

will still be incredibly delicious.

- Storage: Store any leftover dipping oil in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3-4 days. The olive oil will solidify in the fridge; simply let it come to room temperature for 15-20 minutes before serving. Always bring it back to room temperature for the best flavor and texture.

Nutrition Information

Please note that the nutrition information below is an estimate and is provided for informational purposes only. It is calculated for the dipping oil only and does not include the bread.

- Serving Size: ~2 tablespoons
- Calories: 190
- Total Fat: 21g
- Saturated Fat: 3g
- Cholesterol: 2mg (if using cheese)
- Sodium: 160mg

- Total Carbohydrates: 1g
- Dietary Fiber: 0g
- Sugars: 0g
- Protein: 1g (if using cheese)