



The Foodies Handbook

Herbs & Spices Section
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HERBS AND SPICES

Herbs are low growing aromatic plants used fresh or dried as a seasoning. Herbs and spices have been used in cooking since ancient times, and were especially popular in the medieval period. The recent upsurge in vegetarianism has increased awareness of the benefits that both herbs and spices can bring to food. There is little nutritional value in herbs, yet they form an important ingredient in every menu. Always at their best when picked fresh and used immediately, however the dried varieties are often far more convenient to use. The best time to gather herbs for drying and storing is just before they begin to flower. They should be picked in dry weather whilst they are still fresh and crisp. After removal of all discoloured leaves they should be hung up to dry in bunches or in paper bags. The most satisfactory and hygienic method is to dry them in a cool oven or microwave. Herbs are best used as additional seasoning and flavouring agents, excessive use should be avoided. They should be used to improve and enhance the natural flavours of food not to hide them. Many fresh herbs also make an attractive garnish. Parsley in particular, both chopped and whole, is well suited for this purpose. Dried herbs obtained commercially should be purchased in small quantities, as the flavour and aroma will deteriorate with lengthy storage. The flavour from dried herbs is stronger than when fresh, therefore use only a third of the amount if substituting dried for fresh. Popular herbs include: balm, basil, bay leaves, borage, chervil, chives, dill, marjoram, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, tarragon and thyme.

Spices are an aromatic seasoning or flavouring obtained from various plants. Produced from either the roots, stems, seeds, flowers or berries but never the leaves. Popular spices include: allspice, aniseed, capers, caraway seed, cardamom, cassia, cayenne pepper, celery seed, chilli, cloves, coriander, cumin, fennel, fenugreek, ginger, mace, mustard, nutmeg, paprika, pepper, poppy seed, saffron, sesame, sichuan pepper, star anise, turmeric and vanilla.

-A-

Allspice So called because of its flavour, a blend of cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg. It is the unripe fruit of the pimento tree. Allspice is ground and used in sauces, pickles, sausages, fruit pies, cakes and milk puddings. Also known as 'Jamaican pepper'. Latin name *pimenta diocia*.

Angelica Known for its green candied stalk which is invaluable with glace cherries as a sweet decoration. Adding a piece of angelica to stewed fruit reduces the tartness. Latin name *herba angelica* meaning 'angelic plant'

Anise Pepper A hot tasting seasoning produced from the berries of the Chinese Prickly Ash. The ripe berries are roasted to release their aromatic oils, before being crushed or ground. It has a pronounced spicy-woody aroma, with a hint of aniseed. Used to flavour Sichuan crispy duck and Pang Pang chicken, it is also known as Sichuan pepper and Chinese pepper.

Aniseed The fruit and seed of the aniseed plant; liquorice flavoured, and used for pickles, confectionary and drinks. Sweet and spicy in flavour.

-B-

Balm A sweet smelling herb used in soups, stews and casseroles. Also used in medicine for those suffering nervous complaints and depression. Also known by its French name *bame*.

Basil An important culinary herb, which has a nutmeg flavour and a special affinity with tomato dishes. Also good with stews, soups, sausages and vinaigrettes. Derived from the Latin *basilicum* meaning 'royal herb'. Latin name *ocimum basilicum*.

Bay Leaves The aromatic leaves of the bay laurel or sweet bay tree, an evergreen tree native to the Mediterranean. Used fresh or dried in soups, stews, fish and vegetable dishes. Often used in bouquet garni. Latin name *laurus nobilis*.

Borage A Mediterranean plant with large leaves and blue star shaped flowers. The young leaves taste of cucumber and are used in salads, but is mostly found in drinks such as Pimms and claret cup. Also known by its French name *bourrache*. Latin name *borago officinalis*.

-C-

Cajun Seasoning A seasoning used in Cajun cookery, usually rubbed into meat or fish and allowed to marinate before cooking, and consisting of: garlic, onion, paprika, peppercorns, cumin, mustard seeds, cayenne pepper, oregano, thyme and salt. Usually coarsely ground.

Capers The flower buds of the Mediterranean caper bush, dried and preserved in vinegar or brine. Used in pickles and sauces they are graded according to size, the smallest being the best. Latin name *capparis spinosa*.

Caraway Seed Grown mainly in Holland this plant has small fine leaves and white or pinkish flowers. The aromatic dried ripe fruit of the caraway plant, used as a spice in cakes, breads, sauerkraut and cheese dishes. Also used in the liqueur Kummel. Latin name *carum carvi*.

Cardamon The aromatic green seeds and pods of the perennial tropical cardamom plant. Used whole or crushed as a spice in Indian cooking, or as a flavouring in cakes. Strong smelling with a hint of lemon, used by some in herbal teas. Latin name *elettaria cardamomum*.

Carob An evergreen tree native to the Mediterranean, with red flowers, edible seeds and fruit. A sweet tasting chocolate like powder, produced from the seeds of and pods of the carob tree. Also known by its French name *carrobe*. Latin name *ceratonia siliqua*.

Cassia An evergreen Asian tree with aromatic bark, resembles cinnamon in flavour and appearance. One of the oldest spices, recorded in the bible as one of the spices Moses was commanded to use to anoint the tabernacle. Often used as a cheaper substitute for cinnamon, but is less suitable for puddings due to its coarser texture. Not commonly used in Europe, but a popular spice in America. Latin name *cinnamomum aromaticum*.

Cayenne Pepper A hot tasting ground red powder, obtained by grinding dried red cayenne chilli peppers. Pungent and best used sparingly, excellent with cheese dishes.

Celery Salt The combination of celery seeds and rock salt, ground together to produce flavoured seasoning.

Celery Seed The seeds of the celery plant. Used as a seasoning for soups, stews, fish sauces and cheese dishes. If used in soups or sauces they are best tied into a piece of muslin.

Chervil A mild delicate herb with small neatly shaped leaves, an aromatic herb with a hint of aniseed. Used fresh or dry. Because of its attractive shape the fresh leaves are frequently used as a garnish on cold buffets. Latin name *anthriscus cerefolium*.

Chillies A member of the capsicum family, chillies and sweet peppers come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours. Indigenous to Central and South America as well as the West Indies, they have been cultivated for many years. Available fresh, sun dried, pickled, ground or processed in oil or as a sauce, they have little aroma and vary in taste from mild through to very hot.

Chinese Five-Spice A spice mixture used throughout China and Vietnam to season meat, poultry and marinades. Sometimes containing cardamom, dried ginger or liquorice root, but usually consisting of star anise, fagara, cinnamon, fennel seeds and cloves. The ingredients are ground together to form a fine powder.

Chive A culinary herb of long fine hollow green tubes resembling tall grass, and a strong flavour similar to that of onions. Derived from the Latin word *cepa* meaning 'onion'. Latin name *allium schoenoprasum*.

Cilantro Coriander leaves. Derived from the Latin word *coriandrum* meaning 'coriander'.

Cinnamon The dried bark of the cinnamon tree, a tropical evergreen native to Asia. It is used whole in strips or finely ground into a powder. An aromatic spice used in puddings, cakes and buns. Whole cinnamon sticks are used to add flavour to German mulled wine.

Clove An evergreen tropical tree native to Moluccas, the dried flower buds of which are used as an aromatic spice. Other parts of the tree are used to produce clove oil. Used in flavouring fruit dishes and pickles. Derived from the Latin word *clavus* meaning 'nail' Latin name *syzgium aromaticum*.

Coriander An aromatic plant native to the Mediterranean and Asia. The leaves are used fresh in oriental cookery and salads, and dried to flavour soups. The seeds are hot and spicy, and frequently dried and ground into a powder. An essential ingredient in curries. See also 'cilantro'. Latin name *coriandrum sativum*.

Cumin An aromatic Mediterranean plant belonging to the carrot family, the seeds of which are used ground or whole. A constituent of curry powder, also used to flavour soups, rice, cheese and as a sausage seasoning. Latin name *cuminum cyminum*.

-D-

Dill An aromatic European plant with fine feathery leaves and flat flower heads. Used as a flavouring or garnish, dill leaves have a mild caraway flavour and need to be used in large quantities to have any effect. Used in salads and as a garnish for scrambled egg and white meat dishes, classically combined with mustard and served with fish; especially salmon. The seeds are usually dried and are more pungent. Used to flavour vinegar and pickles. Latin name *anethum graveolens*.

-F-

Fennel An aromatic European plant with a flavour resembling aniseed. Traditionally associated with fish dishes the seed are used dried and whole, while the slight feathery leaves are best used fresh. The edible stalks resemble celery in appearance, while the tuberous root of Florence Fennel is used as a delicate vegetable. Derived from the old English word *finufle* meaning 'hay'. Latin name *foeniculum vulgaredulce*.

Fenugreek A leguminous European plant belonging to the pea family. The pods contain brown seeds which are roasted and dried, then ground for use as a spice. An ingredient of curry powder. Derived from the old French word *fenugrec* meaning 'Greek hay'. Latin name *trigonella foenum graecum*.

Fine Herbs This is a traditional mixture of the fresh herbs chervil, chives, tarragon and parsley. Often referred to in many classical French recipes.

-G-

Galangal An Asian plant cultivated for its pungent aromatic root, similar to ginger and used fresh, dried or as a ground powder. It has a distinctive flavour, tasting of ginger and pepper with a sour lemon-like note. Available in two types: 'lesser galangal' which is native to China and smaller than the 'greater galangal' which is found in Indonesia. Used as with ginger but especially in Thai curry pastes, and as a flavouring in beers and liqueurs. Latin name *alpinia officinarum*.

Garam Masala The principle spice blend of north Indian cookery, available in several varieties it can be either a simple or complicated mix. The spices are usually dry roasted and ground before being blended, although sometimes they are left whole. A typical garam masala may contain: chillies, cinnamon, coriander seeds, fenugreek, green cardamoms, mace, mustard seeds and peppercorns A Hindi term translating as 'hot spices'.

Ginger A widely cultivated plant originating from Asia. The hot flavoured edible underground stem rhizome, used fresh, candied, pickled or in powdered form as a spice. Used ground in baked goods or as a whole processed root in curries, pickles and sauces. Latin name *zingiber officinale*.

Gomasio A Japanese seasoning consisting of black sesame seeds and coarse salt. The seeds are first roasted and, when cool, ground together with the salt. It is often sprinkled on rice, raw vegetables and salads.

Grains Of Paradise The brown coloured seeds of a cultivated perennial reed-like plant, native to Western Africa. Related to cardamom they have a pungent, hot pepper-like flavour. Once used to flavour mulled wine and beer, but now not commonly used outside of Africa. Excellent with braised lamb, aubergines and potatoes. Also used in 'ras el hanout' and 'Tunisian five spice'.

-H-

Harissa A North African chilli paste produced by blending fresh chillies, tomatoes and

oil. Used as a flavouring in cooking or as a table condiment. Traditionally served with couscous. A simple alternative is often produced by mixing paprika and Tabasco sauce.

Herbes de Provence A mixture of the classic Provencal herbs marjoram, oregano, rosemary, savoury and thyme; sometimes with the addition of fennel seeds.

-J-

Jamaican Pepper Another name for 'allspice'.

-L-

Liquorice A perennial plant native to the Mediterranean, with spiked blue feathery leaves and a sweet flavoured edible root. The dried black root of the liquorice plant, or an extract produced from it. Latin name *glycyrrhiza glabra*.

Long Pepper A vine plant native to the monsoon forests of the Malabar coast in southwestern India, now widely cultivated and the source of common pepper. 'Black peppercorns' are the unripe fruit of the vine. 'White', 'green' and 'pink' peppercorns are from the same plant but harvested at different periods. The 'Long pepper' spice is the whole dried berry strings, around 2½cm/1in long and resembling small, stiff, grey-black catkins. Not commonly found outside of Asia, and used in pickles and preserves.

-M-

Mace A cultivated spice grown in Asia and the West Indies. The outer covering of the nutmeg seed. It has a vibrant yellow-orange colour and similar to nutmeg in flavour and taste, although slightly milder. Used whole, in blade form, or less commonly ground, to flavour soups, sausages, cakes and puddings. Widely used in Dutch cookery to flavour cabbage, cauliflower, creamed potato, vegetable purees, cheese sauce, stews and puddings. The Italians frequently add it to veal and pasta fillings, while in Britain it is mostly found in fruit cakes, desserts or with rice. Derived from the Latin word *macir* meaning 'Asian spice'.

Marjoram A Mediterranean herb with aromatic leaves and small white or purple flowers, used as a seasoning in cookery and salads. A sweet flavour it works well with most foods including pork, chicken, fish, cheese and eggs. Derived from the old French word *marjorane*. Latin name *origanum majorana*.

Masala A mixture of assorted spices blended into a paste with oil and used to flavour South Asian dishes. Any dish that is flavoured with a masala paste, for example 'chicken tikka Masala'.

Melange Classique An aromatic French blend of herbs and spices consisting of: 5 bay leaves, 2 teaspoons thyme, 2 teaspoons nutmeg, 2 teaspoons cloves, 1½ teaspoon white peppercorns, 1½ teaspoons coriander seeds, 1 teaspoon marjoram, 1 teaspoon rosemary, and 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper.

Mint Various mints are grown for culinary use, but mostly the European garden or spearmint variety are used. An extremely aromatic green leaved herb, the leaves of which are used to flavour potatoes, peas, lamb and cold sweets. The small fresh leaves are used

as a garnish. Latin name *mentha*.

Mixed Spice Another name for ‘pudding spice’.

Mustard The seeds of the brassica mustard plant, ground into a fine powder after most of the natural oils have been extracted, and blended into a paste. Used as a condiment or in devilled dishes. A member of the *brassica* family.

-N-

Nigella Seeds The small black seeds of the nigella plant, a Mediterranean variety of buttercup. Similar to poppy seeds and with a mild, aromatic peppery flavour. Used in Asian cookery to flavour beards, curries, pickles and as a pepper substitute. Also known as ‘black cumin’. Derived from the Latin word *nigellus* meaning ‘blackish’. Latin name *nigella sativa*.

Nutmeg A tropical evergreen tree native to eastern India. The tree produces a large apricot like nut that when ripe splits to reveal its seed, the nutmeg. Used ground or grated this aromatic spice is a popular addition in baking and pastry work. Commonly combined with pasta and cheese dishes. Derived from the Latin word *nuxmuscata* meaning ‘nut smelling like musk’. Latin name *myristica fragrans*.

-O-

Onion Seeds Another name for ‘nigella seeds’.

Oregano A wild variety of the plant marjoram, native to the Mediterranean region. Used extensively in Italian and Greek cookery, the leaves may be used dried or fresh in pasta sauces, stuffing’s, salads, soups, vegetable and egg dishes. Derived from the Greek word *origanon* meaning ‘wild marjoram’. Latin name *origanum vulgare*.

Orris Root The fragrant root of the orris, a plant related to the iris. Used dried and ground as a spice in African cookery, an ingredient of ‘ras el hanout’.

-P-

Paprika A deep red, powdered spice prepared from a variety of sweet red capsicum pepper. A mild spice used especially in Hungarian dishes such as goulash, as well as pizzas, pastas, chicken and chilli. A Hungarian word meaning ‘pepper’.

Parsley A widely cultivated plant with small compacted green leaves, a member of the carrot family. Probably the most commonly used herb, it may be added to almost any dish. The leaves may be used fresh or dried, or whole sprigs are often used to garnish hot or cold dishes. Added to dressings, soups, sauces, casseroles, fish, cheese, potatoes, etc. Chewing a sprig of fresh parsley helps remove the taste, and scent, of garlic. Latin name *petroselinum crispum*.

Pepper A hot seasoning commonly used as a table condiment, and made from the ground dried berries of a tropical climbing plant. Black pepper is produced from berries that are dried before they ripen, white pepper from berries that ripen before they are dried. Used whole as a flavouring or ground as a seasoning.

Peppercorn A small dried tropical berry used in cooking.

Pickling Spice An English blend of spices used for producing chutneys, pickles and flavoured vinegars. The spices should be used whole and either placed in the vinegar together with the items being preserved, or simmered in a small quantity of vinegar before being strained and used. The latter method is best used when making chutneys. Almost any combination of spices may be used, but a classic recipe is for 600ml/1pint of vinegar is: 2 teaspoons black peppercorns, 2 teaspoons mustard seeds, 2 teaspoons coriander seeds, 1 teaspoon fresh ginger, 1 teaspoon whole cloves, ½ teaspoon mace and ½ teaspoon allspice. If you produce your own spice mix avoided using salt, this tends to be used in the preparation of the vegetables and so is not required.

Poppy Seed An perennial plant with cup-shaped seed pods and a milky sap, producing small black seeds with a delicate nutty taste. Used mainly in backing for garnishing breads and rolls, but also used in pastries, dips, salad dressings and curries.

Pudding Spice An English sweet spice mix used in biscuits, cakes and puddings and consisting of varying quantities of cinnamon, clove, mace, nutmeg, coriander and allspice. Also known as ‘mixed spice’.

-Q-

Qalat Daqqa The Arabic name for ‘Tunisian five spice’.

Quatre-Epices This is a French four spice blend and is commonly used with ‘charcuterie’ and stews. Often cinnamon or allspice is used, but a common mixture is: 5 teaspoons black peppercorns, 5 teaspoons nutmeg, 1 teaspoon cloves and 1 teaspoon of dried ginger.

-R-

Ras El Hanout A North African spice mix commonly used in Moroccan cookery and containing over twenty various spices. Translating as ‘head of the shop’ and so named because it was the shop owner that would blend the spices, usually to his own personal taste. The exact blend varies and is available ground or whole, but it is always warm and aromatic. A typical ras el hanout could include: cardamom, mace, galangal, long pepper, cubebs, nutmeg, allspice, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, rose buds, lavender flowers, Spanish fly, ash berries, grains of paradise, black pepper, chufa nuts, turmeric, cassia, nigella, monks pepper, belladonna and orris root.

Rosemary An aromatic evergreen bush native to Southern Europe, with greyish-green needle-shaped leaves. A strong flavoured herb best used in moderation. It may be used fresh or dried in sauces, roasts, stews and fish dishes. Derived from the Latin words *ros* meaning ‘dew’ and *marinus* meaning ‘by the sea’. Latin name *rosmarinus officinalis*.

-S-

Saffron Grown mainly in Spain, the worlds most expensive spice. A golden red in colour, with a hay like fragrance and subtle metallic notes and high in vitamin B2 and riboflavin. Produced from the dried red stigmas of the saffron crocus, *crocus sativus*, it is the worlds most expensive food by weight. It takes 120,000 crocus flowers to produce

1kg of saffron, picked by hand and costing up to £360 an ounce. Not as commonly used today as it once was when it would be frequently found in soups and sauces. In Spain it is a key ingredient in fish and rice dishes such as 'paella'. The French add it to fish dishes, the Italians use it with risotto, while in Britain it is mostly used in cakes and liqueurs. A rich teacake known as a 'saffron bun' was traditionally eaten for Lent. Derived from the old French word *safran*. Also known as 'kesar' and 'kunyit kering'. Latin name *crocus sativus*.

Sage A plant native to North America, a bush found in arid regions with silvery wedge-shaped leaves. It has a bitter taste, and can aid digestion when eaten with fatty foods. Used in stuffing's and with pork, duck and goose. Also known as sagebush. Latin name *salvia officinalis*.

Sesame Seed Rich, sweet nut like seed remembering the flavour of toasted almonds, mainly used to decorate breads and rolls. Cultivated from a tropical plant native to Asia, the seeds are rich in oil which is extracted and used as a flavouring in Oriental cooking. Derived from the Latin word *sesamon*. Latin name *sesamum indicum*.

Shichimi Togarashi A Japanese mixed spice blended from seven ingredients, hence the name which translates as seven-flavour. Used as a kitchen and table condiment to add flavour to soups, noodles and grilled meats. The ingredients are: white and black sesame seeds, sansho, dried laver, dried tangerine peel, chilli powder and poppy seeds.

Sichuan Pepper A hot tasting seasoning produced from the berries of the Chinese Prickly Ash. The ripe berries are roasted to release their aromatic oils, before being crushed or ground. It has a pronounced spicy-woody aroma, with a hint of aniseed. Used to flavour Sichuan crispy duck and Pang Pang chicken, it is also known as anise pepper and Chinese pepper.

Star Anise The fruit of an evergreen tree related to the magnolia and native to China. An eight pointed star shaped spice, with the flavour of aniseed and liquorice. The stars are broken open to reveal the seeds, which are generally used whole but often ground into a fine powder. Not a popular spice outside of China, where it is used to flavour chicken, pork and fish. It has a sweet pungent aroma that works well with fruits and jams. Latin name *illicium verum*.

Steakhouse Pepper A seasoning used to flavour grilled steaks, roasted beef and chipped potatoes. A blend of sea salt, black pepper, dried onion, dried garlic, celery, paprika and dried chillies. Also used to flavour mayonnaise when producing steakhouse mayo.

Sumac A Middle Eastern spice obtained from the fruit of a small bush related to the cashew. The small red berries are dried and then ground before being used, as are the leaves.

-T-

Tarragon A perennial herb native to Asia with small narrow green aromatic leaves, with a slight hint of aniseed. Used fresh to flavour béarnaise sauce, salad dressings and vinegar. Excellent also with chicken and cold fish dishes. Latin name *artemisia dracunculus*.

Thyme A low growing bush with small aromatic leaves. Native to Northern Europe it has a strong penetrating flavour, used fresh or dried in liver pate, eggs, chicken, rice and

vegetables. A source of thymol. Derived from the Greek word *thuein* meaning ‘burn, sacrifice’, because thyme was frequently used as incense.

Tunisian Five Spice A blend of five ground spices used in lamb and vegetable dishes, and consisting of black peppercorns, cloves, grains of paradise, nutmeg and cinnamon. Also known by its Arabic name ‘qalat aqua’.

Turmeric A tropical Asian plant and member of the ginger family. The root is similar in appearance to ginger but is bright orange in colour when peeled. Used dried and ground as a spice in curry powder, and as a colouring in rice dishes. Derived from the French phrase *terra-merite* meaning ‘worthy earth’. Latin name *curcuma longa*.

-V-

Vanilla The long dark fleshy narrow seed pod of a tropical climbing orchid. Used extensively in cold sweets and puddings. Add a whole vanilla pod to castor sugar, and leave to infuse for a week or so before using as a dusting agent, or in a recipe. Derived from the Spanish word *vainilla* meaning ‘small sheath’.

-Z-

Zahtar A Middle Eastern spice blend consisting of roasted sesame seeds blended with thyme, coarsely grounded sumac and sea salt.

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