

# Herbs, Spices, Flavors & Seasonings

Cooking with herbs is like icing a cake: it makes the dish complete. It may seem daunting at first. There are so many herbs and so many recipes to choose from. And, while using recipes that include herbs is a good way to get started, the excitement comes when the unique flavor of each herb is understood and can be used to create your own special dish. Here are three tips to get you started.

1. Take a clean leaf of the herb and chew but don't swallow. Experience your herbs like you would a fine wine; check the fragrant bouquet, let the leaf meet the tongue and chew thoughtfully. It is not necessary to swallow. Learning about the flavor of the herb this way will help you to decide if it will make the perfect pot roast or sorbet.

2. Add fresh chopped herbs (one at a time) to something bland yet familiar, like butter or sour cream or potatoes. This allows the intensity of the herb to stand on its own and helps you to know how much of the herb to add.

3. Just start playing; add a little Rosemary or Tarragon to the potatoes or the chicken; sprinkle some Oregano on your pizza or pasta; lay sprigs of Thyme on your roast. Keep notes, at least at first of what was pleasing, how much was used and what didn't work. Note whether the herbs were fresh or dried or a combination of both. You will find this invaluable, especially when you start blending herbs together to get more complex flavors

Since there are so many herbs, spices, and flavorings that I use in the recipes in this book I decided that it was worth my time and effort to research herbs and spices, include history, pictures, and other tidbits. Yes, this section is nearly 20 pages long now, but I think it will prove to be a valuable resource. While I spent hours on the Internet looking up all the bits and details I almost gave up and decided to

eliminate this section, then something happened. I went on vacation with my husband's family to a lovely beach house in Delaware. While preparing dinner one night I was chopping fresh cilantro and my husband's sister noted that it smelled like coriander. I smiled and said, "Of course. Cilantro is the fresh leaves of the same plant. Coriander is the seed of that plant. That's why they smell similar."

It highlighted the point to me that not everyone has experienced herbs the way I have. Having had an extensive herb garden, I am quite picky about my herbs. Hopefully I can pass on some of my discriminating tastes through these pages.

*Allspice* – Allspice takes its name from its aroma, which smells like a combination of spices, especially cinnamon, cloves, ginger and nutmeg. In much of the world, allspice



is called pimento because the Spanish mistook the fruit for black pepper, which the Spanish called *pimienta*. This is especially confusing since the Spanish had already called chillies *pimientos*. Let's also thank the Spanish for centuries of linguistic confusion created by naming all the natives they met 'Indians'.

Allspice is the only spice that is grown exclusively in the Western Hemisphere. The evergreen tree that produces the allspice berries is indigenous to the rainforests of South and Central America where it grows wild. Unfortunately the wild trees were cut down to harvest the berries and few remain today. There are plantations in Mexico and parts of Central America but the finest allspice comes from Jamaica where the climate and soil are best suited to producing the aromatic berries.

Dried allspice berries resemble large brown peppercorns. Unripe berries are harvested and sun dried until the seeds in them rattle.

They vary in size between 4 to 7 mm (1/8 - 1/4 in) in diameter and are dark brown with wrinkled skins. The outer case contains two dark, hard kidney-shaped seeds. Allspice is available whole or ground. Sometimes the whole berry will be called 'pimento'.

Whole dried allspice will keep indefinitely when kept out of light in airtight jars. It can be ground in a spice mill or an electric coffee grinder. The ground spice loses flavor quickly.

Jerked meats like pork and chicken reflect the Spanish/Jamaican background of Allspice. It is a particularly popular spice in European cooking, an important ingredient in many marinades, pickling and mulling spices. Many patés, terrines, smoked and canned meats include allspice. A few allspice berries are added to Scandinavian pickled herring, to Sauerkraut, pickles, soups, game dishes and English spiced beef. Traditionally, allspice has been used in cakes, fruit pies, puddings ice cream and pumpkin pie. Some Indian curries and pilaus contain allspice and in the Middle East it is used in meat and rice dishes. It is also used in liqueurs, notably Benedictine and Chartreuse.

Allspice can be used as a substitute, measure, for measure, for cinnamon, cloves or nutmeg. Conversely to make a substitution for allspice, combine one part nutmeg with two parts each of cinnamon and cloves. I use it for pickling, gingerbread, pumpkin & squash dishes, and relishes.

*Basil* – Basil originated in India and Persia, and was both prized and despised by ancient peoples. Though its name means, "be fragrant," Greeks hated it. However, the Romans loved it and made it a symbol of love and fertility and settlers in early America prized it. Today, Hindus plant it in their homes to bring happiness to the family. Basil is grown primarily in the United States, France, and the Mediterranean region.

Basil is a bright green, leafy plant, *Ocimum basilicum*, which is in the mint family. An annual herb with heart-shaped leaves, a fragrant aroma reminiscent of anise, and a warm, sweet, aromatic, mildly pungent flavor.



Basil is widely used in Italian cuisine and is often paired with tomatoes. It is also used in Thai cooking. The herb complements meat, vegetables, cheese, and egg dishes.



Leaves of several different basil varieties: From left to right Mediterranean ("sweet") basil, African Blue, lemon basil, spice basil, Thai basil (Siam Queen) and tree basil, upper and lower sides.

Basil tastes great in tomato and pasta dishes but it is also gives a sweet scented, mint aroma when crumbled over baked chicken, lamb, or fish. It blends well with garlic, thyme, and oregano. Crush dried leaves with your hand or in a mortar and pestle to release the herb's flavor. Start with 1/2 teaspoon for 4 servings; add more to taste.

*Bay Leaves* – The bay tree is indigenous to Asia Minor, from where it spread to the Mediterranean and then to other countries with similar climates. According to legend the Delphi oracle chewed bay leaves, or sniffed the smoke of burning leaves to promote her visionary trances. Bay, or laurel, was famed in ancient Greece and

Rome. Emperors, heroes and poets wore wreaths of laurel leaves. The Greek word for laurel is *dhafni*, named for the myth of the nymph Daphne, who was changed into a laurel tree by Gaea, who transformed her to help her escape Apollo's attempted rape. Apollo made the tree sacred and thus it became a symbol of honor. The association with honor and glory continue today; we have poet laureates (Apollo was the God of poets), and *bacca-laureate* means "laurel berries" which signifies the completion of a bachelor degree. Doctors were also crowned with laurel, which was considered a cure-all. Triumphant athletes of ancient Greece were awarded laurel garlands and laurel was given to winners at Olympic Games since 776 BC. It was also believed that the laurel provided safety from the deities responsible for thunder and lightning. The Emperor Tiberius always wore a laurel wreath during thunderstorms.

The bay leaf is oval, pointed and smooth, 2.5 - 8 cm (1 to 3 in) long. When fresh, the leaves are shiny and dark green on top with lighter undersides. When dried the bay leaf is a matte olive green. The smell is Warm and quite pungent when broken and the aromatic oils are released.



Dried leaves should be whole and olive green. Brown leaves will have lost their flavor. Whole leaves are often used in cooking and crushed or ground leaves can be used for extra strength. Kept out of light in airtight containers the whole leaf will retain flavor for over two years.

Bay leaves are widely used throughout the world. It may be best known in bouquets garnis or used similarly in soups, sauces, stews, daubes and courts-bouillon's, an appropriate seasoning for fish, meat and poultry. Bay leaf is often included as a pickling spice.

*Borage* - Used as a culinary herb since the Middle Ages. Folk remedies claimed it could instill courage and dispel sadness. Bright flowers and hairy leaves distinguish this European herb whose flavor is reminiscent of cucumber. It is an annual herb with rough hairy stems and leaves. Both the flowers and leaves are used in salads, but the leaves must be chopped finely so their hairy texture isn't off-putting. The leaves are also used to flavor teas and vegetables. The inflorescence (flower cluster), a coiled spiral that unrolls and straightens from the base as the flowers open, is the hallmark of the family.



More than 2,500 species are found in the temperate and subtropical regions of the world. The flowers that grew around my home in Northern California were a brilliant blue in color. I used them most often as decorations on cakes.

*Caraway* - Caraway is native to Asia as well as northern and central Europe. First used in antiquity, Caraway has been cultivated in Europe since the Middle Ages. Evidence of Caraway's use in medieval times comes from seeds found in debris in lakes in Switzerland. Caraway is thought to be the spice used longer than any other in Europe. Writings from the 17th century indicate that Caraway Seed was used in breads, fruits, and cakes, and considered a digestive aid.

Caraway Seed is actually the fruit of a biennial herb in the parsley family, known as *Carum carvi*. The seed is about 1/5 inch long and tapered at the ends. The hard seed shells have five pale ridges.



Holland is the world's largest Caraway producer. It is also grown in Germany, Russia, Morocco, parts of Scandinavia,

Canada, and the United States. Caraway Seed is a common flavoring for many kinds of rye bread. It is also used to flavor sauerkraut, sausage, cheese, cabbage, and soups. Caraway Seed has a pungent aroma and a distinctly sweet but tangy flavor. For enhanced flavor, lightly toast Caraway Seed before use in cheese dishes or potato salad. Caraway Seed is great for use in sauerkraut, soups, and stews; add Caraway in the last 15 minutes of cooking for best flavor. Sprinkle Caraway Seed lightly over spice cakes before baking. Mix 1/4 cup melted butter with 1 to 2 teaspoons Caraway Seed; spread on French bread or pour over green beans. Duck & goose, pork roasts, cabbage, breads, noodles, cheese spreads

*Cardamom* – Cardamom is one of the world's very ancient spices. It is native to the East originating in the forests of the Western Ghats in southern India, where it grows wild. Today it also grows in Sri Lanka, Guatemala, Indo China and Tanzania. The ancient Egyptians chewed cardamom seeds as a tooth cleaner; the Greeks and Romans used it as a perfume. Vikings came upon cardamom about one thousand years ago, in Constantinople, and introduced it into Scandinavia, where it remains popular to this day. Cardamom is an expensive spice, second only to saffron. It is often adulterated and there are many inferior substitutes from cardamom-related plants, such as Siam cardamom, Nepal cardamom, winged Java cardamom, and bastard cardamom. However, it is only *Elettaria cardamomum* which is the true cardamom. Indian cardamom is known in two main varieties: Malabar cardamom and Mysore cardamom. The Mysore variety contains higher levels of cineol and limonene and hence is more aromatic.

A member of the ginger family, cardamom grows in many tropical areas including India, Southeast Asia and South and Central America. Cardamom pods contains about 20 tiny seeds. Cardamom has a pungent aroma and a warm, spicy-sweet flavor. It's widely

used in Scandinavian and East Indian and mid-Eastern cooking. This aromatic spice has a warm, spicy-sweet flavor. Cardamom seeds may be removed from the pods and ground, or the entire pod may be fried in ghee or oil for several minutes to release its oils. Usually cardamom is added before a dish's other ingredients are browned. The pod is quite bitter and should be discarded after frying..

Cardamom comes from the seeds of a ginger-like plant. The small, brown-black sticky seeds are contained in a pod in three double rows with about six seeds in each row. The pods are between 5-20 mm (1/4"-3/4") long, the larger variety known as 'black', being brown and the smaller being green. White-bleached pods are also available. The pods are roughly triangular in cross section and oval or oblate. Their dried surface is rough and furrowed, the large 'blacks' having deep wrinkles. The texture of the pod is that of tough paper. Pods are available whole or split and the seeds are sold loose or ground. It is best to buy the whole pods as ground cardamom quickly loses flavor.



Cardamom has a pungent, warm and aromatic smell. Its flavor is warm and eucalyptine with camphorous and lemony undertones. Black cardamom is blunter; the eucalyptus and camphor suggestions in the aroma are very pronounced.

The pods can be used whole or split when cooked in Indian substantial meals — such as pulses. Otherwise, the seeds can be bruised and fried before adding main ingredients to the pan, or pounded with other spices as required. Keep the pods whole until use. The pod itself is neutral in flavor and not generally used, imparting an unpleasant bitter flavor when left in dishes. Cardamom is used mainly in the Near and Far East. Its commonest Western

manifestation is in Dutch ‘windmill’ biscuits and Scandinavian-style cakes and pastries, and in akvavit. It features in curries, is essential in pilaus (rice dishes) and gives character to pulse dishes. Cardamom is often included in Indian sweet dishes and drinks. At least partially because of its high price, it is seen as a ‘festive’ spice. Other uses are; in pickles, especially pickled herring; in punches and mulled wines; occasionally with meat, poultry and shellfish. It flavors custards, and some Russian liqueurs. Cardamom is also chewed habitually (like nuts) where freely available, as in the East Indies, and in the Indian masticory, betel pan. It is a flavoring for Arab and Turkish coffee which is served with an elaborate ritual. I use it as my secret ingredient in my French Toast recipe.

*Chervil* - Chervil is native to southern Russia. Pliny, in the first century, used Chervil as a seasoning. The Romans took it to France where it has been important for centuries. Only recently has it been cultivated and used in the United States.

Chervil is a light green, lacey, fernlike leaf of *Anthriscus cerefolium*, a low growing member of the parsley family. The leaves of this aromatic and sweet herb bear a slight resemblance to parsley; however, the flavor is more distinctive with a trace of anise.



Chervil is one of the classic components of the popular French herb blend, fines herbes.

Chervil brings out the flavor of other herbs. Stir it into scrambled eggs or cheese and ham omelets. Chervil is useful for adding color and flavor to creamy dressings for pasta and potato salads. Add it to butter sauced mushrooms and serve over grilled steak or chicken breasts. Crush Chervil in

your hand or with a mortar and pestle before use.

Delicately-flavored parsley, this aromatic herb has curly, dark green leaves with a hint of anise flavor. It is one of the main ingredients in “fines herbes”. Chervil is also called cicily and sweet cicily .

*Cilantro (See Coriander)*

*Cinnamon* – Cinnamon is the inner bark of a tropical evergreen tree. There are many different species, between 50 and 250, depending on which botanist you choose to believe. The two main varieties are *Cinnamomum cassia* and *Cinnamomum zeylanicum*. The first, cassia, we will consider separately in its own section. *C. zeylanicum* is also known as Ceylon cinnamon (the source of the its Latin name, zeylanicum), or ‘true cinnamon’ which is a lighter color and possessing a sweeter, more delicate flavor than cassia. A native of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) the best cinnamon grows along the coastal strip near Colombo. In ancient Egypt cinnamon was used medicinally and as a flavoring for beverages, It was also used in embalming, where body cavities were filled with spiced preservatives. In the ancient world cinnamon was more precious than gold. This is not too surprising though, as in Egypt the abundance of gold made it a fairly common ornamental metal. Nero, emperor of Rome in the first century AD, burned a years supply of cinnamon on his wife’s funeral pyre — an extravagant gesture meant to signify the depth of his loss. Cinnamon was known in medieval Europe, where it was a staple ingredient, along with ginger, in many recipes. Since most meals were prepared in a single cauldron, casseroles containing both meat and fruit were common and cinnamon helped bridge the flavors. When crusaders brought home sugar, it too was added to the pot. Mince pie is a typical combination of this period which still survives. The demand for cinnamon was enough to launch a number of explorers’

enterprises. The Portuguese invaded Sri Lanka immediately after reaching India in 1536. The Sinhalese King paid the Portuguese tributes of 110,000 kilograms of cinnamon annually.

The Dutch captured Sri Lanka in 1636 and established a system of cultivation that exists to this day. In its wild state, trees grow high on stout trunks. Under cultivation, the shoots are continually cropped almost to ground level, resulting in a low bush, dense with thin leafy branches. From these, come the finest quills.

Cinnamon comes in 'quills', strips of bark rolled one in another. Most people tend to call them 'sticks'. The pale brown to tan bark strips are generally thin, the spongy outer bark having been scraped off. The best varieties are pale and parchment-



like in appearance. Cinnamon is very similar to cassia, and in North America little distinction is given, though cassia tends to dominate the market. Cinnamon is also available ground, and can be distinguished from cassia by its lighter color and much finer powder.

Whole quills will keep their flavor indefinitely. Unfortunately it is difficult to grind so for many recipes the powdered variety will be preferred. Like other powdered spices cinnamon loses flavor quickly, so should be purchased in small quantities and kept away from light in airtight containers.

Cassia and cinnamon have similar uses, but since it is more delicate, cinnamon is used more in dessert dishes. It is commonly used in cakes and other baked goods, milk and rice puddings, chocolate dishes and fruit desserts, particularly apples and pears. It is common in many Middle Eastern and North African dishes, in flavoring lamb tagines or stuffed aubergines. It is used in curries and

pilau and in garam masala. It may be used to spice mulled wines, creams and syrups. The largest importer of Sri Lankan cinnamon is Mexico, where it is drunk with coffee and chocolate and brewed as a tea. Pastries, French toast, hot apple cider and even Indian cuisine

*Clove* – The word 'clove' is from the Latin word for 'nail' – *clavus*. The clove is native to the North Moluccas, the Spice Islands of Indonesia. It is cultivated in Brazil, the West Indies, Mauritius, Madagascar, India, Sri Lanka, Zanzibar and Pemba. The Chinese wrote of cloves as early as 400 BC. and there is a record from 200 BC of courtiers keeping cloves in their mouths to avoid offending the emperor while addressing him. Arab traders delivered cloves to the Romans. Cloves were once very costly and played an important part in world history. Wars were fought in Europe and with native islanders to secure rights to the profitable Clove business. Natives in the Molucca Islands planted a Clove tree for each child born. They believed that the fate of the tree was linked to the fate of that child. In 1816, the Dutch set a fire to destroy Clove trees and raise prices. The natives revolted in a bloody battle which changed the climate and politics of the area forever.

Cloves are the immature unopened flower buds of a tropical tree. When fresh, they are pink, dried, they turn to a rust-brown color. Measuring 12-16 mm (1/2"-5/8") long, they resemble small nails, with a tapered stem. The large end of the clove is the four-pointed flower bud.



Cloves are best bought whole. As a powder flavor quickly deteriorates. Being extremely hard, it is difficult to grind cloves with a mortar and pestle so an electric grinder such as a coffee grinder is recommended. Store in an airtight container out of direct light.

Cloves can easily overpower a dish, particularly when ground, so only a few need be used. Whole cloves are often used to “stud” hams and pork, pushing the tapered end into the meat like a nail. A studded onion is frequently used to impart an elusive character to courts-bouillons, stocks and soups. Cloves are often used to enhance the flavor of game, especially venison, wild boar and hare. They are used in a number of spice mixtures including ras el hanout, curry powders, mulling spices and pickling spices. Cloves also figure in the flavor of Worcestershire sauce. They enjoy much popularity in North Africa and the Middle East where they are generally used for meat dishes, though rice is often aromatized with a few cloves.

*Coriander* - Coriander is probably native to the Middle East and southern Europe, but has also been known in Asia and the Orient for millennia. It is found wild in Egypt and the Sudan, and sometimes in English fields. It is referred to in the Bible in the books of Exodus and Numbers, where the color of ‘manna’ is compared to coriander. The seed is now produced in Russia, India, South America, North Africa — especially Morocco - and in Holland. It was introduced to Britain by the Romans, who used it in cookery and medicine, and was widely used in English cookery until the Renaissance, when the new exotic spices appeared. Among ancient doctors, coriander was known to Hippocratic, and to Pliny who called it coriandrum for its ‘buggy’ smell, *coris* being a bug; or perhaps because the young seed resembles *Cimex lectularius*, the European bed-bug. Coriander is the seed of a small plant. The seeds are almost spherical,



one end being slightly pointed, the other slightly flattened. There are many longitudinal ridges. The length of the seed is 3 - 5 mm (1/8" - 3/16") and the color, when dried, is usually brown, but may be green or off white. The seed is generally sold dried and

in this state is apt to split into halves to reveal two partially hollow hemispheres and occasionally some internal powdery matter. Coriander is available both whole and ground. The fresh leaves of the plant are called cilantro and are used as an herb.

Coriander seed is generally used coarsely ground or more finely powdered, depending on the texture desired. It is best bought whole as, being brittle, it is easy to mill or pound in a mortar. Ground coriander is apt to lose its flavor and aroma quickly and should be stored in an opaque airtight container. Whole seeds keep indefinitely. Their flavor may be enhanced by a light roasting before use. As coriander is mild, it is a spice to be used by the handful, rather than the pinch. The leaves can be chopped or minced before use. They lose flavor when dried, but may be frozen either blanched or chopped and frozen into ice cubes.

The commonest use of coriander seed is in curry powders, where it is the bulkiest constituent, often rough ground in India to give a crunchy texture. The seeds can be likewise used in stews and soups. They blend well with smoked meats and game and feature in traditional English black pudding recipes and Italian mortadella sausage. Coriander is an ingredient of garam masala, pickling spices and pudding spices and is used in cakes, breads and other baked foods. Sugared comfits made from the seeds are a traditional sweetmeat and breath sweetener. Coriander is a characteristic of Arab cookery, being common with lamb, kid and meat stuffings. Taklia, a popular Arab spice mixture, is coriander and garlic crushed and fried. Coriander with cumin is a common combination and features in falafel and in the Egyptian appetizer dukka, which consists of those spices plus sesame seeds, hazelnuts, salt and pepper, roasted and crushed. Coriander goes well with ham and pork, especially when orange is included. It enhances fish dishes and, with other spices,

may form a delicious coating for spiced fish or chicken, rubbed into the scored flesh and grilled. Try frying a few seeds with sausages to add an unusual flavor. Coriander complements chili and is included in many chili recipes, such as harissa, the hot North African red pepper sauce. It may be added to cream or cottage cheese.

The leaves (known as the herb Cilantro) are always used fresh. They feature in Spanish,



Middle Eastern, Indian, Oriental and South American cookery. They are sprinkled like parsley on cooked dishes, minced or puréed in sauces, soups and curries, especially bhuna. Both seeds and leaves can be used in salads. In Thailand the root of the coriander plant is used to flavor meats and curries.

*Crushed (or ground) Red Pepper (Cayenne)* – Capsicum peppers are native to Mexico, Central America, the West Indies, and parts of South America. The Spanish discovered the pods in the New World and brought them back to Europe. Before the arrival of Spaniards, Indians in Peru and Guatemala used capsicum medicinally to treat stomach and other ailments.

Red Pepper is made from the ground fruit of a plant in the Capsicum family. The fruits, commonly known as "chilies" or "chili peppers," are fiery red or orange pods which rarely grow to more than 4 inches in length.



The ground product ranges from orange-red, to deep, dark red. According to the American Spice Trade Association, "Red Pepper" is the preferred name for all hot red pepper spices. Cayenne Pepper is another name for the same type of product. Some

manufacturers use the term Cayenne Pepper to refer to a hotter version of Red Pepper.

Red Pepper is used to achieve the characteristically hot flavor of Mexican, Creole, Cajun, Thai, Szechuan, and Indian cooking. It also is used in chili, Spanish rice, and barbecue sauce as well as meats, salads, and casseroles.

Red pepper is a pungent, hot powder with a strong bite.

Use small amounts of Red Pepper. It is a biting condiment, and the flavor intensifies as it is cooked. For a spicy snack, add ground Red Pepper and salt to hot oil; saute blanched almonds until golden. Or add a dash of Red Pepper, onion, cheese, and bacon to beaten eggs for scrambled eggs or omelet. Try adding Red Pepper to barbecue steak sauce. Use it to marinate or baste steaks.

Many Mexican and Asian dishes call for this potent spice. One teaspoon of either can create a "meal of fire". We use it in chili, pizza, stews, tomato & meat sauces. Use this spice as your taste dictates.

*Cumin* – Cumin is native to the Levant and Upper Egypt. It now grows in most hot countries, especially India, North Africa, China and the Americas. The spice is especially associated with Morocco, where it is often smelt in the abundant street cookery of the medinas. Cumin was known to the Egyptians five millennia ago; the seeds have been found in the Old Kingdom Pyramids. The Romans and the Greeks used it medicinally and cosmetically to induce a pallid complexion. In Indian recipes, cumin is frequently confused with caraway, which it resembles in appearance though not in taste, cumin being far more powerful. This is due to a misunderstanding of the Indian word *jeera*. The term usually means cumin, but can occasionally mean caraway, so in doubtful cases, cumin is generally to be understood. The use of the terms 'black cumin' for nigella, and 'sweet cumin' for

aniseed or fennel, further confounds this confusion. As a general rule interpret *jeera* or *zeera* (jira, zira) as cumin and *kalonji* as nigella. When the seeds themselves are in doubt, cumin is easily distinguished from the other Umbelliferae by its flavor, and its shape and color is quite different from nigella. Classically, cumin symbolized greed; thus the avaricious Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, came to be known privately as ‘Cuminus’

Cumin is the seed of a small umbelliferous plant. The seeds come as paired or separate carpels, and are 3-6mm (1/8-1/4 in) long.



They have a striped pattern of nine ridges and oil canals, and are hairy, brownish in color, boat-shaped, tapering at each extremity, with tiny stalks attached. They resemble caraway seeds, but are lighter in color and unlike caraway, have minute bristles hardly visible to the naked eye. They are available dried, or ground to a brownish-green powder. Cumin is freely available in the West, although it is not a traditional European spice.

The seeds should be lightly roasted before being used whole or ground to bring out the aroma. Cumin may also be pounded with other spices in mixtures such as curry powder. Ground cumin must be kept airtight, to retain its pungency. This spice should be used with restraint - it can exclude all the other flavors in a dish. Less than a teaspoon of it will flavor a meal for four.

Cumin is used mainly where highly spiced foods are preferred. It features in Indian, Eastern, Middle Eastern, Mexican, Portuguese and Spanish cookery. It is an ingredient of most curry powders and many savoury spice mixtures, and is used in stews, grills - especially lamb - and chicken dishes. It gives bite to plain rice, and to beans and cakes. Small amounts can be usefully used in aubergine and kidney bean dishes. Cumin

is essential in spicy Mexican foods such as chile con carne, casserole pork and enchiladas with chili sauce. In Europe, cumin flavors certain Portuguese sausages, and is used to spice cheese, especially Dutch Leyden and German Munster, and burned with woods to smoke cheeses and meats. It is a pickling ingredient for cabbage and Sauerkraut, and is used in chutneys. In the Middle East, it is a familiar spice for fish dishes, grills and stews and flavors couscous - semolina steamed over meat and vegetables, the national dish of Morocco. Zeera pani is a refreshing and appetising Indian drink made from cumin and tamarind water. Cumin together with caraway flavors Kummel, the famous German liqueur.

This spice is most known for use with Indian and Mexican cooking. It adds a different “temperature” to your recipe when seasoning chicken, onions and peppers. It use it in couscous, curries, cabbage dishes, chili, and sausage dishes.

*Cream of Tartar* - Cream of Tartar has been known since ancient times. Cream of Tartar is a natural, pure ingredient left behind after



grape juice has fermented to wine. Cream of Tartar is obtained from wine producing regions. Cream of Tartar is used to stabilize egg white foams. It is also a major ingredient in baking powder. Cream of Tartar has no aroma and has an acidic flavor.

*Dill Seed & Weed* – The word “dill” comes from the Norse “dilla”, meaning “to lull”. Drinking dill tea is recommended to overcome insomnia. A native to Europe, it is a Russian favorite and can be cultivated near the Arctic Circle. Both seeds and leaves are edible. It was known as a medicinal herb to the ancient Greeks and Romans, where soldiers placed burned dill seeds on their wounds to promote healing. Medieval Europe could not grow it fast enough for love potions, casting spells and for

protection against witchcraft. “Therewith her Veruayne and her Dill, That hindreth Witches of their will” (Drayton, *Nymphidia*, 1627). Carrying a bag of dried dill over the heart was considered protection against hexes.

The seed is light brown, winged and oval, with one side flat, with two ridges. The other side is convex with three ridges and three oil channels. Seeds are about 3.5 mm (0.15 in) long. The leaves and stalks are aromatic and are used fresh or for pickling.



Seeds can be used whole or crushed in a mill or coffee grinder. The dried seeds keep indefinitely when kept out of sunlight in an airtight container.

Dill is mainly used in pickling, where most of the plant is used. “Dill Pickles” have become a North American classic and in Europe Sauerkraut and dill vinegars have been popular for centuries. It is especially popular in Russia and Scandinavia, where it is used in courts-bouillons and sauces for fish, pickled salmon, casseroles and soups. It is also used on cakes and breads, particularly in rye breads, the way caraway is used. Dill should be used sparingly as the flavour grows. Its flavour works well in sour cream and yogurt sauces. The chopped fresh leaves are frequently used with trout and salmon, shrimp, deviled eggs, green beans, cauliflower, beets, soups, cottage and cream cheese.

For dips and sauces, dill can be used to add a refreshing flavor. This spice also works well with potato salad, cold soups, omelets, shellfish, mushrooms, and cucumbers.

*Garlic*- Garlic is native to central Asia, but its use spread across the world more than

5000 years ago, before recorded history. It was worshipped by the Egyptians and fed to workers building the Great Pyramid at Giza, about 2600 BC. Garlic cloves have been used for thousands of years and their use has been recorded in ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, China, Japan, India, Russia and Europe. Greek athletes ate it to build their strength. Garlic was dedicated by Roman soldiers to Mars, their god of war. It has been used to ward off demons. It has been known as “Russian penicillin” and has been used to treat ear infections, cholera and typhus. Garlic came to the Western Hemisphere with some of the first European explorers, and its use spread rapidly. In the United States it was first cultivated in New Orleans by French settlers. Missionaries brought it to California, where it is grown today. Known as a natural anti-biotic, garlic was used during both world wars to disinfect wounds. This anti-oxidant is also believed to help lower cholesterol. Garlic contains an antimicrobial agent known as allicin and can easily be added to many foods.

Garlic is the dried root of *Allium sativum*, a member of the lily family. Garlic grows in a bulb that consists of a number of cloves. Each clove is protected by a layer of skin, but all are held together in one larger unit by additional layers of skin. This is the most



important spice in the majority of my recipes. It is called for in food from Italy to Japan. Garlic can be used on meats, stews, casseroles, soups, roasts and steaks. Available in many different forms, fresh garlic always tastes best, however it may not be on hand, or peeling cloves may not be convenient. In many recipes you may use garlic powder and garlic cloves interchangeably, however garlic powder is more concentrated and should be used in smaller quantities than fresh garlic.

*Ginger* – Ginger is native to India and China. It takes its name from the Sanskrit word *stringa-vera*, which means “with a

body like a horn”, as in antlers. Ginger has been important in Chinese medicine for many centuries, and is mentioned in the writings of Confucius. It is also named in the Koran, the sacred book of the Moslems, indicating it was known in Arab countries as far back as 650 A.D. It was one of the earliest spice known in Western Europe, used since the ninth century. It became so popular in Europe that it was included in every table setting, like salt and pepper. A common article of medieval and Renaissance trade, it was one of the spices used against the plague. In English pubs and taverns in the nineteenth century, barkeepers put out small containers of ground ginger, for people to sprinkle into their beer — the origin of ginger ale. In order to ‘gee up’ a lazy horse, it is the time honored practice of Sussex farmers to apply a pinch of ginger to the animal’s backside.

Although often called “ginger root” it is actually a rhizome. It is available in various forms, the most common of which are as follows:

**Whole raw roots** are generally referred to as fresh ginger. A piece of the rhizome, called a ‘hand’. It has a pale yellow interior and a skin varying in color from brown to off-white. Jamaican ginger, which is pale buff, is regarded as the best variety. African and Indian ginger is darker skinned and generally inferior, with the exception of Kenya ginger.



**Whole fresh roots** provide the freshest taste. The roots are collected and shipped when they are still immature, the outer skin is a light green color. These can sometimes be found in Oriental markets.

**Dried roots** are sold either ‘black’ with the root skin left on, or ‘white’ with the skin

peeled off. The dried root is available whole or sliced.

**Powdered ginger** is the buff-colored ground spice made from dried root.

**Preserved or ‘stem’ ginger** is made from fresh young roots, peeled and sliced, then cooked in a heavy sugar syrup. The ginger pieces and syrup are canned together. They are soft and pulpy, but extremely hot and spicy.

**Crystallized ginger** is also cooked in sugar syrup, then air dried and rolled in sugar.

**Pickled ginger** has the root sliced paper-thin and pickled in a vinegar solution. This pickle is known in Japan as gari, which often accompanies sushi, and is served to refresh the palate between courses.

In Asian cooking ginger is almost always used fresh, either minced, crushed or sliced. Fresh ginger can be kept for several weeks in the salad drawer of the refrigerator. Dried ginger should be ‘bruised’ by beating it to open the fibers, then infused in the cooking or making ginger beer and removed when the flavor is sufficient. Store dried and powdered ginger in airtight containers.

Mostly used in my oriental recipes, you can find ginger in ground and fresh forms. In its pickled form it enhances sushi greatly. To store fresh ginger, keep a little in your freezer. Use a grate to measure out what you need. For ground ginger, it is best used sprinkled on chicken, whitefish breads, cakes and cookies. Really adds zing to fruit dishes like cranberry sauce. Goods, meat, fish, chicken, fruit sauces and green salads. It is used in pickles, chutneys and curry pastes and the ground dried root is a constituent of many curry powders. Tender young ginger can be sliced and eaten as a salad. Sometimes the roots will produce green sprouts which can be finely chopped and added to a green salad. In the West, dried ginger is mainly used in cakes and

biscuits, especially ginger snaps and gingerbread. Ginger is also used in puddings, jams, preserves and in some drinks like ginger beer, ginger wine and tea.

*Lemon balm* - is less a spice than a medical herb, in past times much used against stomach ailment and nervous conditions. It has, however, some value as spice, because of its fresh and pure lemon taste, which makes it a perfect substitute for fresh lemon grass or (in dried form) sassafras.

Lemon balm is an herbaceous perennial in the mint family. Its foliage has a distinctive lemony fragrance when bruised. The leaves are light green, crinkled, slightly hairy, strongly toothed on the margins, more or less egg shaped, and about 1-3 in (2.5-7.6 cm) in length. As is typical of herbaceous mints, lemon balm leaves are arranged in opposing pairs on square stems. The little flowers are 0.5 in (1.3 cm) in diameter are produced all summer long. They are pale yellow maturing to pale lilac and arranged in irregular whorls at leaf nodes on upright stems. The flowers are not at all showy and the plant is generally grown for its lemon scented leaves. A mature lemon balm plant can stand 2-3 ft 0.6-0.9 m) tall and spread and sprawl 2-3 ft (0.6-0.9 m) across.



Lemon balm occurs naturally in southern Europe and northern Africa where it grows in waste places, roadsides and disturbed lands from sea level into the mountains. It has escaped cultivation and established itself in England, northern Europe and in North America.

In Central Europe, lemon balm is sometimes used to flavor sweet drinks. The leaves make an interesting decoration on many dishes and may be used generously if you (and your guests) like the aroma. They fit best to fish, poultry and salads; it is also suggested

to use balm leaves for any dish containing lemon juice to get a more intensive lemon aroma. If available, the fresh leaves are to be preferred. True lovers of this herb may want to try a *pesto* made of lemon balm leaves instead of basil.

Lemon balm has a great affinity for fresh fruits, especially apples; thus, it is sometimes found in fruit-based desserts. Balm can also be used to flavor other fruits or fruit-based desserts. Because herbal vinegar is mostly made from apple vinegar, it may benefit from a few balm leaves.

I grew Lemon Balm in my herb garden and loved adding it to fish dishes or even to a flower arrangement that acted as my centerpiece.

*Marjoram* – Marjoram is indigenous to the Mediterranean area and was known to the Greeks and Romans, who looked on it as a symbol of happiness. It was said that if marjoram grew on the grave of a dead person, he would enjoy eternal bliss.



Marjoram is the gray green leaf of *Majorana hortensis*, a low growing member of the mint family. It is often mistaken for oregano, although they are not the same plant.

Marjoram is used as a flavoring for meat dishes. Marjoram has a delicate, sweet, pleasant flavor with a slightly bitter undertone. Crush in your hand or with a mortar and pestle before using. Marjoram's mellow taste and enticing fragrance make it compatible with a wide variety of foods. It won't overpower: start with 1/2 teaspoon per 4 servings. Complements lamb dishes, as well as beef and veal. Marjoram blends well with parsley, dill, basil, or thyme. Try it in soups or stews. It has a mild flavor that tastes great with poultry, tomatoes, squash and mixed in salad dressings. I use it in lamb

dishes, poultry stuffing, stews, soups, sausages, and spaghetti sauce.

*Mint* – Mint has been used for many centuries. The name comes from the Greek legend of the nymph Minthe, who attracted the attention of Hades. Hades' wife, the jealous Persephone, attacked Minthe and was in the process of trampling her to death when Hades turned her into the herb (and was ever sacred to him). A symbol of hospitality and wisdom, "the very smell of it reanimates the spirit", Pliny tells us. Ancient Hebrews scattered mint on their synagogue floors so that each footstep would raise its fragrance. Ancient Greeks and Romans rubbed tables with mint before their guests arrive. The Romans brought mint and mint sauce to Britain. The pilgrims brought mint to the United States aboard the Mayflower. The Japanese have distilled peppermint oil for several centuries and the oil is further treated to produce menthol. The smell of mint is known to keep mice away and pennyroyal is also regarded as an effective insecticidal against fleas and aphids.



The leaves of several species (there are over 40 varieties) of the plant *Mentha*, the commonest in culinary use being spearmint (*mentha spicata* or *crispa*). Pennyroyal (*mentha pulegium*) is also used in the kitchen and peppermint (*mentha piperita*) is cultivated for its oil. There are many varieties of mint in cultivation, each with a distinctive bouquet and flavor, but here we will describe only the three mentioned above. Spearmint and peppermint leaves are deep green, long, pointed and crinkled. Pennyroyal has small oval leaves, grayish in color.

Dried mint should be kept in a tightly sealed glass jar away from light.

For most culinary purposes spearmint is the preferred variety. Mint combines well with many vegetables such as new potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and peas. A few chopped leaves give refreshment to green salads and salad dressings. Pennyroyal is used to season haggis and black puddings but luckily I don't eat either of those so I don't need Pennyroyal in my cupboard! Peppermint is more commonly used in desserts, adding fresh flavor to fruits, ices and sherbets. Spearmint is popular in the Balkans and Middle East, where it is used both fresh and dried with grilled meats, stuffed vegetables and rice and is an essential ingredient of dolmas, stuffed vine leaves. Dried mint is sprinkled over hummus and other pulse and grain dishes. Yogurt dressings, dips and soups often include mint. In India fresh mint chutney is served with birianis. American mint julep is a southern classic and a glass of English Pimms #1 must always be served with a sprig of mint. Mint tea is enjoyed copiously by Moslem Arabs. Peppermint is used to flavor toothpaste, chewing gum and liqueurs such as *creme de menthe*.

This pungent spice/herb comes in a multitude of varieties such as Peppermint, Spearmint, and even Chocolate Mint. It is used as a garnish as well as an ingredient in sauces. Wonderful in ice tea and mixed drinks.

*Mustard* - It was the condiment, not the plant that was originally called mustard. The condiment got its name because it was made by grinding the seeds of what was once called the *seny* plant into a paste and mixing it with *must* (an unfermented wine). Mustard is one of the oldest spices and one of the most widely used. The Chinese were using mustard thousands of years ago and the ancient Greeks considered it an everyday spice. The first medical mention of it is in the Hippocratic writings, where it was used for general muscular relief. The Romans used it as a condiment and pickling spice. King Louis XI would travel with his own royal mustard pot, in case his hosts didn't

serve it. Today, world consumption of mustard tops 400 million pounds.

The Brassica genus includes broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, turnips and radishes. The mustard family also includes plants grown for their leaves, like arugula, a number of Oriental greens, as well as mustard greens. Three related species of mustard are grown for their seeds:

**White Mustard** (*Brassica alba* or *Brassica*



*hirta*) is a round hard seed, beige or straw colored. Its light outer skin is removed before sale. With its milder flavor and good preservative qualities,

this is the one that is most commonly used in ballpark mustard and in pickling.



**Black Mustard**

(*Brassica nigra*) is a round hard seed, varying in color from dark brown to black, smaller and much more pungent than the white.



**Brown Mustard**

(*Brassica juncea*) is similar in size to the black variety and vary in color from light to dark brown. It is more pungent than the white,

less than the black.

Can you tell the difference between the black and the brown? I can barely perceive a slight color difference, but I'll reply on the spice experts when I buy them!

Whole seeds are included in most pickling spices. Seeds can also be toasted whole and used in some dishes. Powdered mustard is usually made from white mustard seed and is often called mustard flour. When dry, it is as bland as cornstarch — mixed with cool water its pungency emerges after a glucoside

and an enzyme have a chance to combine in a chemical reaction (about ten minutes). Don't use hot water as it will kill the enzyme and using vinegar will stop the reaction so that its full flavor will not develop. Once the essential oils have formed, then other ingredients can be added to enhance the taste: grape juice, lemon or lime juice, vinegar, beer, cider or wine, salt, herbs, etc.

Whole white mustard seed is used in pickling spice and in spice mixtures for cooking meats and seafood. It adds piquancy to Sauerkraut and is sometimes used in marinades. In India, whole seeds are fried in ghee until the seed pops, producing a milder nutty flavor that is useful as a garnish or seasoning for other Indian dishes. The brown seed is also pounded with other spices in the preparation of curry powders and pastes. Mustard oil is made from *B. juncea*, providing a piquant oil widely used in India in the same way as ghee. Powdered mustard acts as an emulsifier in the preparation of mayonnaise and salad dressings. Powdered mustard is also useful for flavoring barbecue sauces, baked beans, many meat dishes, deviled eggs, beets and succotash. There are many ready-made mustards from mild and sweet to sharp and strong. They can be smooth or coarse and flavored with a wide variety of herbs, spices and liquids.

**American** ballpark-style mustard is made from the white seeds and blended with sugar and vinegar and colored with turmeric.

**Bordeaux** mustard is made from black seeds blended with unfermented wine. The seeds are not husked, producing a strong, aromatic, dark brown mustard often flavored with tarragon.

**Dijon** mustard is made from the husked black seeds blended with wine, salt and

spices. It is pale yellow and varies from mild to very hot. This is the mustard generally used in classic French mustard sauces, salad dressings and mayonnaise.

**English** mustard is hot, made from white seeds and is sometimes mixed with wheat flour for bulk and turmeric for color.

**German** mustard is usually a smooth blend of vinegar and black mustard, varying in strength. Weisswurstsenf is a coarse grained, pale, mild mustard made to accompany veal sausages like Bratwurst.

**Meaux** mustard is the partly crushed, partly ground black seed mixed with vinegar, producing a crunchy, hot mustard that perks up bland foods.

*Nutmeg* – The nutmeg tree is a large evergreen native to the Moluccas (the Spice Islands) and is now cultivated in the West Indies. It produces two spices — mace and nutmeg. Nutmeg is the seed kernel inside the fruit and mace is the lacy covering (aril) on the kernel.

The Arabs were the exclusive importers of the spice to Europe up until 1512, when Vasco de Gama reached the Moluccas and claimed the islands for Portugal. To preserve their new monopoly, the Portuguese (and from 1602, the Dutch) restricted the trees to the islands of Banda and Amboina. The Dutch were especially cautious, since the part of the fruit used as a spice is also the seed, so that anyone with the spice could propagate it. To protect against this, the Dutch bathed the seeds in lime, which would prevent them from growing. This plan was thwarted however, by fruit pigeons who carried the fruit to other islands, before it was harvested, scattering the seeds. The Dutch sent out search and destroy crews to control the spread and when there was an abundant harvest, they even burned nutmeg to keep its supply under control. Despite

these precautions, the French, led by Pierre Poivre (Peter Piper) smuggled nutmeg seeds and clove seedlings to start a plantation on the island of Mauritius, off the east coast of Africa, near Madagascar. In 1796 the British took over the Moluccas and spread the cultivation to other East Indian islands and then to the Caribbean. Nutmeg was so successful in Grenada it now calls itself the Nutmeg Island, designing its flag in the green, yellow and red colors of nutmeg and including a graphic image of nutmeg in one corner.

Nutmeg has long been lauded as possessing or imparting magical powers. A sixteenth century monk is on record as advising young men to carry vials of nutmeg oil and at the appropriate time, to anoint their genitals for virility that would see them through several days. Tucking a nutmeg into the left armpit before attending a social event was believed to attract admirers. Nutmegs were often used as amulets to protect against a wide variety of dangers and evils; from boils to rheumatism to broken bones and other misfortunes. In the Middle Ages carved wooden imitations were even sold in the streets. People carried nutmegs everywhere and many wore little graters made of silver, ivory or wood, often with a compartment for the nuts.

The nutmeg seed is encased in a mottled yellow, edible fruit, the approximate size and shape of a small peach. The fruit splits in half to reveal a net-like, bright red covering over the seed. This is the aril which is collected, dried and sold as mace. Under the aril is a dark shiny nut-like pit, and inside that is the oval shaped seed which is the nutmeg. Nutmegs are usually sold without the mace or hard shell. They are oval, about 25 mm (1 in) in length, lightly wrinkled and dark brown on the outside, lighter brown on the inside. Nutmeg is sold whole or ground, and is labeled as 'East Indian' or 'West Indian' indicating its source. Whole nutmeg may be



coated with lime to protect against insects and fungus, though this practice is giving way to other forms of fumigation.

Whole nuts are preferable to ground nutmeg, as flavor deteriorates quickly. Whole nuts will keep indefinitely and can be grated as required with a nutmeg grater. Nutmeg is poisonous and should be used in moderation, a pinch or two is safe. Used in small dosages nutmeg can reduce flatulence, aid digestion, improve the appetite and treat diarrhea, vomiting and nausea. Nutmeg's flavor and fragrance come from oil of myristica, containing myristicin, a poisonous narcotic. Myristicin can cause hallucinations, vomiting, epileptic symptoms and large dosages can cause death. These effects will not be induced, however, even with generous culinary usage. Store both ground and whole nutmeg away from sunlight in airtight containers.

Nutmeg is usually associated with sweet, spicy dishes — pies, puddings, custards, cookies and spice cakes. It combines well with many cheeses, and is included in soufflés and cheese sauces. In soups it works with tomatoes, slit pea, chicken or black beans. It complements egg dishes and vegetables like cabbage, spinach, broccoli, beans onions and eggplant. It flavors Italian mortadella sausages, Scottish haggis and Middle Eastern lamb dishes. It is often included as part of the Moroccan spice blend *ras el hanout*. It is indispensable to eggnog and numerous mulled wines and punches.

One whole nutmeg grated equals 2 to 3 teaspoons of ground nutmeg.

*Oregano* – Mediterranean Oregano was originally grown extensively in Greece and Italy. Since Greek and Roman times it has been used with meats, fish, vegetables, and as a flavoring for wine. Before World War II, Oregano was almost unknown in the United States. However, its popularity skyrocketed with the popularity of pizza.

Mediterranean Oregano is the dried leaf of *Origanum vulgare* L., a perennial herb in the mint family. Mexican Oregano is the dried leaf of one of several plants of the *Lippia* genus.



Oregano is grown in California and New Mexico, as well as the Mediterranean region. This is the spice that gives pizza its characteristic flavor. It is also usually used in chili powder. Known for a pungent odor and flavor, Mexican Oregano is a bit stronger than Mediterranean Oregano.

Oregano tastes great with tomato, egg, or cheese based foods, and is also a great addition to many lamb, pork, and beef main dishes. Try sautéing aromatic vegetables in olive oil with garlic and Oregano. You can make a savory sauce with melted butter, lemon juice and a bit of Oregano; drizzle it over grilled fish and poultry. An easy way to accent pasta sauces, salad dressings, and ground meat dishes is with a dusting of crushed Oregano leaves. To release its flavor, crush Oregano by hand or with a mortar and pestle before using it in your recipes.

*Parsley* – Parsley was cultivated as early as the third century BC. The Romans used Parsley as a garnish and flavoring. They put it on their tables and around their necks in the belief the leaves would absorb fumes. Medieval Europeans believed that one could kill an enemy by plucking a sprig while speaking the person's name. It spread to the Americas in the 17th century, where it now grows plentifully. It is the most widely used culinary herb in the United States. Parsley is difficult to process because it takes twelve pounds of fresh Parsley to make one pound of dried. However, more people still use dried Parsley than fresh leaves as a garnish in soups, salads, meats, vegetables, and sauces.

Parsley is the dried leaf of *Petroselinum crispum*, a biennial in the parsley family.

Parsley is most popular as a garnish and is an excellent breath freshener. It is high in vitamins A and C, and contains iron, iodine, and copper.

*Paprika* - Like all capsicums, the paprika varieties are native to South America. Originally a tropical plant, it can now grow in cooler climates. In Europe, Hungary and



Spain are the two main centers for growing paprika peppers, though these varieties have evolved into much milder forms than their tropical ancestors.

Hungarian paprika is known as stronger and richer than Spanish paprika, which is quite mild, though through controlled breeding they are becoming more alike. To maintain the stronger taste that consumers expect, some spice companies add cayenne to heat up Hungarian paprika. It is also produced and used in Turkey, Yugoslavia and the United States. The Spanish grades of pimentón are dulce (sweet), agridulce (semi sweet) and picante (hot). It is also graded for quality, depending on the proportion of flesh to seeds and pith. In Hungary there are six classes ranging from Kulonleges (exquisite delicate) to Eros (hot and pungent). Commercial food manufacturers use paprika in cheeses, processed meats, tomato sauces, chili powders and soups. Its main purpose is to add color. If a food item is colored red, orange or reddish brown and the label lists 'Natural Color', it is likely paprika.

Paprika is a fine powder ground from certain varieties of *Capsicum annum* which vary in size and shape. They may be small and round (Spain and Morocco) or pointed and cone shaped (Hungary and California). They

are larger and milder than chilli peppers. Paprika is produced from peppers ripened to redness, sometimes called 'pimento', the same as used to stuff olives. The powder can vary in color from bright red to rusty brown.

Paprika deteriorates quickly, so it should be purchased in small quantities and kept in airtight containers away from sunlight.

Paprika is intimately associated with Hungarian cuisine especially paprikash and goulash. Many spiced sausages incorporate it, including the Spanish chorizos. Paprika is often used as a garnish, sprinkled on eggs, hors d'ouvres and salads for color. It spices and colors cheeses and cheese spreads, and is used in marinades and smoked foods. It can be incorporated in the flour dusting for chicken and other meats. Many Spanish, Portuguese and Turkish recipes use paprika for soups, stews, casseroles and vegetables. In India paprika is sometimes used in tandoori chicken, to give the characteristic red color. Paprika is an emulsifier, temporarily bonding with oil and vinegar to make a smooth mixture for a salad dressing.

*Pepper* – The history of the spice trade is, above all, the history of pepper, the 'King of Spices'. Pepper has been moving westward from India for 4,000 years. It has been used in trading as an exchange medium like money and, at times, has been valued so highly that a single peppercorn dropped on the floor would be hunted like a lost pearl. In classical times 'tributes' were paid in pepper, and both Attila the Hun and Alaric I the Visigoth demanded pepper as a substantial part of Rome's ransom. Since the Middle Ages, pepper was the core of the European spice trade, with Genoa and Venice dominating the market. The Italian 'pepperers' monopoly of overland trade routes was the major determining factor in driving the search for an eastern sea route.

Pepper comes from several species of a vinous plant, the spice being the fruit, called peppercorns. **Black pepper** is the dried,

unripe berry. The corns are wrinkled and spherical, about 5 mm (1/8 in) in diameter. Malabar and Tellicherry pepper are both considered top quality due to size and maturity, with only 10% of the largest corns being graded as



Tellicherry. **White pepper** starts out the same as the black, but are allowed to ripen more fully on the vine. The outer shell is then removed by soaking the berries in water until the shell falls off, or are held under flowing spring water, yielding a whiter, cleaner pepper. **Green pepper** is from the same fruit but is harvested before they mature. **Pink pepper**, which is not a vinous pepper, comes from the French island of Reunion. Pink peppercorns have a brittle, papery pink skin enclosing a hard, irregular seed, much smaller than the whole fruit.

Black pepper is very pungent and fiery where as White pepper is less pungent and Green pepper is milder with a cleaner, fresher flavor.

Pepper is best purchased whole, as freshly ground pepper is vastly superior to the ready ground powder. Whole peppercorns keep their flavor indefinitely but pepper quickly loses its aroma and heat after it has been ground. Peppercorns are very hard but easily ground in a peppermill. Cracked pepper is the partially broken corns, crushed using a mortar and pestle or with a rolling pin. Dried green peppercorns can be reconstituted for mashing into a paste by soaking in water. Peppercorns should be stored in airtight containers, away from sunlight.

Pepper is best ground directly on to food. With hot food it is best to add pepper well towards the end of the cooking process, to preserve its aroma. White pepper is used in white sauces rather than black pepper, which would give the sauce a speckled appearance. Green peppercorns can be mashed with

garlic, cinnamon or to make a spiced butter or with cream to make a fresh and attractive sauce for fish. Pink peppercorns are called for in a variety of dishes, from poultry to vegetables and fish.

*Rosemary* – Rosemary's name is rooted in legend. The story goes that during her flight from Egypt, the Virgin Mary draped her blue cloak on a Rosemary bush. She then laid a white flower on top of the cloak. That night, the flower turned blue and the bush was thereafter known as the "rose of Mary". Greeks, who wove Rosemary wreaths into their hair, believed Rosemary strengthened the brain and enhanced memory. It was also known as a symbol of fidelity. In the Middle Ages, Rosemary was used medicinally and as a condiment for salted meats. In Europe, wedding parties burned Rosemary as incense. Judges burned it to protect against illness brought in by prisoners.

Rosemary is an herb in the mint family. It is a small evergreen shrub, *Rosmarinus officinalis*. The rosemary bush has a stem usually around three feet but sometimes up



to seven feet tall, and linear leaves about 0.4 inch long resembling curved pine needles, dark green and shiny above, white beneath, and with margins rolled back onto the under face. Rosemary leaves have a tea like fragrance and a pungent, slightly bitter taste. The flowers are bluish, in small axillary clusters. Bees are particularly fond of this plant.

Native to the Mediterranean region, it has been naturalized throughout Europe and temperate America and widely grown in gardens in the warmer parts of the U.S. and in Great Britain. Today it is widely produced in France, Spain, and Portugal.

Typically thought of as an Italian spice, rosemary can be quite versatile. Rosemary is

used primarily in Italy in lamb, pork, chicken, and rabbit dishes. Useful on pizza, lamb dishes, corn bread, turnip, soups, stew, spaghetti sauce. It is a wonderful addition to vinegars and oils for flavoring. Rosemary's attractive smell and light blue flowers makes it a great addition to any garden. Planted near the garden gate it is attributed with bearing the household good fortune.

*Sage* – The name "Sage" comes from the Latin word "salia," meaning "to save." Greeks and Romans used it to cure snake bites and to invigorate the mind and body. In the Middle Ages, people drank Sage in tea and used Sage to treat colds, fevers, liver trouble, and epilepsy.



Although Sage is no longer used medicinally, it has become one of the world's most popular herbs.

Sage is an herb from an evergreen shrub, *Salvia officinalis*, in the mint family. Its long, grayish green leaves take on a velvety, cotton like texture when rubbed (meaning ground lightly and passed through a coarse sieve).

Sage enhances pork, lamb, meats, and sausages. Chopped leaves flavor salads, pickles, and cheese. It is one of the most popular herbs in the United States. Sage has a fragrant aroma and an astringent but warm flavor.

Crumble leaves for full fragrance. Use ground Sage sparingly; foods absorb its flavor more quickly than leaf Sage. Sage is a wonderful flavor enhancer for seafood, vegetables, breadsticks, cornbreads, muffins, and other savory breads. Top swordfish, tuna, steaks, chicken, and turkey pieces with Sagelemon butter. Rub Sage, cracked pepper, and garlic into pork tenderloin or chops before cooking.

This fragrant spice can add flavor to sausage, poultry and fish. In addition, try it with stuffing, mushrooms, onions and scalloped potatoes.

*Thyme* – Ancient Greeks considered Thyme a symbol of courage and sacrifice. Tradition tells that Thyme was in the straw bed of the Virgin Mary and the Christ child. In the Middle Ages, ladies would embroider a sprig of Thyme into scarves they gave to their errant knights. At various periods in history, Thyme has been used to treat melancholy, reproductive system ailments, and to improve digestion. In the 18th century, it was recommended as a cure for a hangover.

Thyme is the leaf of a low-growing shrub in the mint family called *Thymus vulgaris*. Its tiny grayish-green leaves rarely are greater than one-fourth inch long. For use as a condiment, Thyme leaves are dried then chopped, or ground.



Thyme is grown in southern Europe, including France, Spain, and Portugal. It is also indigenous to the Mediterranean.

Thyme is often included in seasoning blends for poultry and stuffing and also commonly used in fish sauces, chowders, and soups. It goes well with lamb and veal as well as in eggs, custards, and croquettes. Thyme often is paired with tomatoes.

Thyme has a subtle, dry aroma and a slightly mint flavor. Mild flavored spice that tastes best when used with poultry or whitefish is thyme. Its flavor also blends well with green beans, mushrooms and in stuffing. I used it in clam & fish chowders, stews, and soups, sprinkled over sliced fresh tomatoes.

Rub minced garlic and Thyme over lamb, pork, or beef roasts. Season cheese, tomato,

and egg dishes with Thyme. Blend fragrant Thyme into poultry stuffing, spaghetti or pizza sauce, and chili along with any combination of marjoram, basil, oregano, sage, rosemary, or garlic.

*Vanilla* – Next to saffron and cardamom, vanilla is the world's next most expensive spice. Growers are known to “brand” their beans with pin pricks before they can be harvested, to identify the owner and prevent theft. Vanilla is native to Mexico, where it is still grown commercially. Vanilla was used by the Aztecs for flavoring their royal drink *xocolatl* - a mixture of cocoa beans, vanilla and honey. Cortez brought vanilla back to Europe in the sixteenth century, after having observed Montezuma drinking the cocoa concoction. It has many non-culinary uses, including aromatizing perfumes, cigars and liqueurs. Europeans prefer to use the bean, while North Americans usually use the extract. Substances called “vanilla flavor” don't contain vanilla at all, being synthesized from eugenol (clove oil), waste paper pulp, coal tar or ‘coumarin’, found in the tonka bean, whose use is forbidden in several countries. Ice cream producers are unlikely to point out that their most popular flavor derives its name from the Latin word *vagina*. For ancient Romans, *vagina* meant sheath or scabbard. The Spanish adopted the word as *vaina*, which developed a diminutive form, *vainilla*, meaning “little sheath”. The Spanish made this diminutive the name of the plant because its pods resemble sheaths.



The flavoring comes from the seed pod, or the ‘bean’ of the vanilla plant. The prepared beans are very dark brown, slender, pleated and about 20 cm (8 in) long. The bean is tough and pliable, quality vanilla having a frosting

of crystal called *givre*. The crystals contain

the active ingredient ‘vanillin’ that produces the characteristic fragrance and is produced during the process of induced fermentation. These pods are called ‘fine vanilla’. ‘Woody vanilla’ is shorter, lighter colored, uncrystallized, stronger and slightly bitter. All beans contain thousands of tiny black seeds. Vanilla extract is also available and, if of good quality, is identical in flavor to the pods.

Vanilla extract is made by percolating alcohol and water through chopped, cured beans, somewhat like making coffee. Vanilla extract is very powerful, a few drops sufficing for most uses. Vanilla bean is a bit more time consuming to use than the extract, but imparts the strongest vanilla flavor without the alcohol of extract. To flavor a liquid base for *crème* sauces, puddings, ice creams, etc., allow one bean per pint to steep in the liquid by boiling and allowing cooling for an hour before removing the bean. This can be repeated a few times if the bean is washed after use, dried and kept airtight. Ground vanilla can also be used, but use half as much and leave in the liquid. Many recipes call for slitting the bean lengthwise and scraping out the tiny black seeds. Airtight storage is necessary, otherwise the aroma will dissipate. A good way to store whole vanilla is to bury it in sugar. Use a jar with a tight-fitting lid that will hold about a pound of sugar, burying the bean so that no light can reach it. After 2 -3 weeks the sugar tastes of vanilla and can be used in coffee or in other recipes and the bean can be removed for other uses and returned to the sugar after cleaning. Keep topping up the sugar.

Vanilla's mellow fragrance enhances a variety of sweet dishes: puddings, cakes, custards, creams, soufflés and, of course, ice cream. Classic examples include *crème caramel*, peach Melba and apple Charlotte. Vanilla flavor is detectable in many chocolate and confectionery items and several liqueurs such as *Crème de Cacao* and *Galliano*.

# Multi-Cultural Pantry Essentials

All Purpose Flour  
Almonds (air tight sealed)  
Baking Powder  
Baking Soda  
  
Beans (dry and/or canned – chick peas, green beans, red beans, black beans, navy beans)

Breadcrumbs  
Brown Sugar  
Canned Peeled Tomatoes  
Canned pineapple  
Canned vegetables (artichoke hearts, mushrooms, corn, peas, green beans)  
Chicken bouillon cubes  
Chocolate Chips (semi-sweet & milk)  
Cider Vinegar  
Cocoa  
Concentrated Tomato Purée  
Condensed Milk  
Corn Starch  
Corn Syrup  
Dried Apricots  
Dried Yeast  
Dry Onion Soup Mix  
Evaporated Milk  
Granulated Sugar  
Honey  
Kirsch (Cherry sherry)

Olive Oil  
Olives  
Pasta - variety  
Peanut Oil  
Pine Nuts  
Pistachios  
Powdered Sugar  
Powdered/Dry Milk  
Raisins (Golden & Dark)  
Ranch Dressing Powder  
Red Wine Vinegar  
Rice  
Rice Wine Vinegar  
Sesame Oil  
Sherry  
Soba Noodles  
Soy Sauce  
Tabasco  
Taco Seasoning

Teriyaki Sauce  
Tuna fish (Albacore in water or oil)  
Walnuts  
White Vinegar  
Worcestershire Sauce

## Added specialty items I try to keep on hand

Capers  
Grape leaves in brine  
Real Maple Syrup  
Sesame Seeds  
Nori  
Poppy Seeds  
Fresh ginger (in the freezer)  
Pickled ginger  
Coconut (shredded and the milk in a can)  
Red Chili Sauce  
Wasabi  
Water Chestnuts

### Measuring Equivalents

**3 teaspoons = 1 tablespoon**

**4 tablespoons = 1/4 cup**

**2 tablespoons = 1/8 cup**

**1 cup = 8 oz fluid**

**16 oz = 1 pound**

**1 cup = 1/4 liter**

**1 quart = .96 liters**