

Guide to Spices & Herbs



Spices & Herbs

A world of flavours at our fingertips

The key to elevating our culinary and health journey lies in using spices and herbs. This guide explores the world of spices and herbs, and how use them to take our cooking and health to the next level.

The basics

Start with a small collection of versatile spices and herbs, and build from there. Examples include:

| Spice or herb | Flavour profile | Possible uses |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Basil | Sweet and peppery | Add in pasta, pizza, salads, sauces such as pesto, and stir fry. |
| Black pepper | Earthy and slightly spicy | Top bowls, pasta dishes, salads, vegetables, and more. |
| Chili | Intensely spicy | Add intense heat to chili, curries, soups, stews, and more. |
| Cinnamon | Earthy and sweet | Sweeten baked goods, desserts, fruit, oatmeal, and more. |
| Coriander | Earthy and peppery | Deepen the flavour of chili, curries, soups, stews, and more. |
| Cumin | Earthy and smoky | Elevate bowls, chutney, rice dishes, soups, stews, and more. |
| Curry powder | Earthy and warm | Deepens South-Asian inspired dishes, such as curry and dal. |
| Garam masala | Slightly spicy and warm | Spice up South-Asian inspired dishes, such as curry and dal. |
| Garlic powder | Sweet with hints of garlic | Add to dishes, such as soups, to infuse a mild garlic flavour. |
| Gochugaru | Spicy and slightly smoky | In Korean inspired dishes, such as kimchi and tofu bowls. |
| Iodized salt | Intensely salty | Can enhance or contrast flavours in dishes to add complexity. |
| Kala namak | Salty with hints of egg | Add an egg-like smell and flavour to dishes, such as tofu. |
| Onion powder | Savoury with hints of onion | Add to dishes, such as bowls, to infuse a bold onion flavour. |
| Oregano | Earthy and slightly bitter | Delicious in tomato-based dishes, such as pizza and pasta. |
| Paprika | Sweet and warm | Add moderate heat to curries, salads, soups, and more. |
| Rosemary | Earthy with hints of lemon | Use in roasted dishes, such as vegetables, pasta, and soups. |
| Turmeric | Peppery and bitter | Infuse a yellow colour in curries, savoury breakfasts, and drinks. |
| Thyme | Earthy and slightly sweet | Use in roasted dishes, such as vegetables, pasta, and soups. |

Tip: international grocery stores with a high turnover tend to offer a variety of freshly stocked high-quality spices at a cheaper price. A fresh spice will have a vibrant colour and rich aroma.

Beyond the basics

When ready to build on the basics with a more complex collection of spices and herbs, consider adding:

| Spice or herb | Flavour profile | Possible uses |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Asafoetida | Hints of onion and garlic | In South-Asian dishes, such as dal, and to mimic onion or garlic. |
| Allspice | Earthy and slightly sweet | Elevate spice mixes, such as in Ras El Hanout Spice Mix . |
| Anise | Strong hints of licorice | Add a tasty twist to drinks and baked goods. |
| Bay leaves | Earthy and slightly sweet | Add depth to rice, sauces, soups, and stews. |
| Caraway | Earthy and slightly spicy | In baked goods, especially brown breads, and sauerkraut. |
| Cardamom | Sweet and warm | Spice up baked goods, curries, hot drinks, and rice dishes. |
| Cajun | Spicy and slightly earthy | Zest up bowls, dips, fries, marinades and pasta. |
| Cayenne | Slightly spicy | Add subtle heat to chili, curries, soups, stews, and more. |
| Cloves | Earthy and sweet | Warm the flavour of baked goods, drinks, and desserts. |
| Dill | Earthy with hints of licorice | In dips, such as ranch, salads, and soup. |
| Fennel seeds | Slight hints of licorice | Freshen up curries, pasta, sauces, and vegetable dishes. |
| Fenugreek | Tangy and slightly bitter | Add in South-Asian inspired dishes, such as curry and dal. |
| Italian spice mix | Earthy and peppery | Season breadcrumbs, croutons, pasta, pizza, and soups. |
| Mace | Slightly sweet | Subtly sweeten baked goods, drinks, and fall-inspired recipes. |
| Majoram | Earthy and slightly sweet | In Middle-Eastern inspired dishes, such as vegetables and soup. |
| Mustard seeds | Slight spicy and nutty | Add moderate heat to bowls, curries, salads, soups, and more. |
| Nutmeg | Sweet and nutty | Sweeten baked goods, drinks, and fall-inspired recipes. |
| Peppercorn | Earthy and slightly spicy | Top bowls, pasta dishes, salads, vegetables, and more. |
| Pumpkin pie spice | Sweet and slightly warm | Perfect in fall-inspired recipes, such as pumpkin pie or drinks. |
| Red pepper flakes | Spicy and slightly peppery | Top bowls, pasta dishes, pizza, vegetables, and more. |
| Sage | Earthy and slightly bitter | Use in roasted dishes, such as vegetables, or in pasta. |
| Saffron | Earthy and slightly sweet | Add floral notes to desserts and rice dishes. |
| Sumac | Tangy with hints of citrus | In Middle-Eastern inspired dishes, such as salads and wraps. |
| Tarragon | Earthy with hints of licorice | Flavouring vinegar, salad dressings, and sauces. |
| Za'atar | Earthy and slightly nutty | In Middle-Eastern inspired dishes, breads, salads, and wraps. |



Five tips to spice (& herb) things up

01. Combine spices and herbs

Part of the art of spices and herbs is combining them to create new food experiences. Some common spice blends are:

- **Curry powder** often includes black pepper, cardamom, cloves, coriander, cumin, fennel, nutmeg, and turmeric.
- **Italian spice mix** often includes basil, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, and thyme.
- **Five-spice powder** often includes cassia, clove, fennel, star anise, and Szechuan pepper.
- **Garam masala** often includes black pepper, cardamom, clove, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, and nutmeg.
- **Ras El Hanout** often includes allspice, black pepper, cayenne, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, ginger, and turmeric.

For inspiration by dish, consider using the following spices and herbs:

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Roasted Veggies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rosemary• Oregano• Thyme• Tarragon• Basil• Rosemary• Dill• Fennel | Stir-Fries <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black pepper• Chili• Cumin• Fennel• Garlic• Ginger• Lemongrass• Onion | Soups <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Basil• Bay leaves• Chili• Cloves• Cumin• Nutmeg• Oregano• Paprika |
| Smoothies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black pepper• Cayenne• Cinnamon• Mint• Ground ginger• Nutmeg• Star anise• Turmeric | Curries <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cardamom• Coriander• Cumin• Curry leaves• Curry powder• Garam masala• Mustard seeds• Turmeric | Salads <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black pepper• Cayenne• Celery seed• Cilantro• Paprika• Parsley• Sumac• Thyme |

Many cuisines feature signature spice and herb pairings, such as:

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Mexican <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cayenne• Chili• Cinnamon• Coriander• Cumin• Garlic• Oregano | Caribbean <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allspice• Cinnamon• Cloves• Garlic• Ginger• Nutmeg• Star anise | Thai <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Basil• Cardamom• Cumin• Curry powder• Ginger• Kaffir leaves• Turmeric | Italian <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Basil• Marjoram• Nutmeg• Oregano• Rosemary• Sage• Thyme |
| Mediterranean <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Basil• Bay leaves• Cardamom• Cinnamon• Cloves• Coriander• Ginger• Oregano• Rosemary• Sumac• Thyme | Indian <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bay leaves• Cardamom• Cayenne• Cinnamon• Coriander• Curry powder• Fenugreek• Garam masala• Ginger• Nutmeg• Paprika• Turmeric | Middle Eastern <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baharat• Basil• Bay leaves• Cardamom• Cloves• Coriander• Cumin• Nigella• Oregano• Sumac• Za'atar | |

02. Strategize timing

Whole spices take longer to release their flavour, whereas ground spices offer a quick and more even dispersion of flavour into dishes. Adding whole spices early in cooking is recommended to allow them enough time to release their flavours. Ground spices are typically added later on in cooking.

For example, our [Potato & Green Pea Curry](#) adds whole cumin seeds earlier on in the recipe, whereas our [Vegan Butter "Chicken"](#) adds ground cumin later on in the recipe.

03. Bloom to deepen flavours

We can gently fry spices and herbs in oil to help deepen their flavour, which is called blooming or tempering. There are three general steps to bloom spices and herbs:

- **1** - Add oil to a pot. If using whole spices, add them to the pot and toast for 2 minutes, stirring throughout. If not using whole spices, add onion and garlic.
- **2** - When the onion and garlic is transparent or golden, add the powdered spices.
- **3** - Cook in the pan for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Stir continuously. Then add the remaining ingredients, such as liquids.

04. Grind whole spices closer to using

While ground spices are convenient, opting for whole spices can level up our cooking for more experienced chefs. The oils in spices are part of what gives them their unique flavours, but ground varieties lose this oil and flavour faster than whole varieties. By grinding whole spices closer to when we use them, we get the freshest flavour. A mortar and pestle or high-quality coffee grinder can work to grind whole spices and herbs.

05. Store carefully

To store spices properly, it's important to keep them away from 4 things: air, light, heat, and moisture. Therefore, store them in airtight containers in a cool, dry, and dark environment. Under these conditions, spices stay fresh for different times based on their form:

- **Whole spices:** freshest in the first year, but can last up to 3 - 4 years.
- **Ground spices:** freshest in the first 6 months, but can last up to 2 - 3 years.
- **Dried herbs:** freshest in the first 6 months, but can last up to 1 - 3 years.
- **Spice and herb blends:** freshest in the first 6 months, but can last up to 1 - 2 years.