



*“How I stock my pantry allows me to cook in the way that I do—simply and yet with great depth of flavor and spontaneity.”*

## SUBCHAPTERS

A Pantry You Can Rely On  
It All Starts With Good Olive Oil  
Vinegars for an Edge  
Master a Vinaigrette  
The Geography of Spices  
Alice’s Essential Condiment:  
Cumin Salt  
Versatile Staples: Rice and Beans  
Dried Pasta: The Taste of Home

## CHAPTER REVIEW

Alice’s pantry has more than shelf-stable ingredients—although those are a large part—and includes things in the freezer, ready-to-go ingredients in the fridge, and perishable staples like garlic and herbs.

### PERISHABLE STAPLES:

Garlic	Chicken stock
Olives	Butter
Fresh herbs	Yogurt
Eggs	Carrots
Lemons	Onions
Mustard	Celery
Cheese	Pickles
Nuts	Sauerkraut

Olive oil is an absolute essential in the pantry. It is the basis for the cooking at Chez Panisse and in Alice’s home kitchen. To choose the best olive oil, you have to taste. The color of each oil will give you some hints but only taste will tell you whether the olive oil is fruity, buttery, rich, green, smooth, or peppery. An olive oil with an off flavor will have an oxidized rancid character. Alice recommends a lighter oil for cooking and a richer oil for sauces and finishing. Consider having an annual tasting party after the new oils come out in the fall. It will cut down on the cost when you taste in a group and it will help you learn together how to articulate what you’re tasting. Alice likes peppery, Tuscan oils but encourages you to find the oils that you like best.

Shop for olive oil at stores where the stock does not linger on the shelves for too long. Some specialty food stores offer olive oil in bulk so you can bring your own bottle and refill. That’s an indicator that they have a large turnover of olive oil, and you can taste it on the spot. For stores without a bulk supply, buy a small bottle of olive oil to test for freshness before committing to a large amount. Check for the calendar year printed on the bottle and use within one year of bottling. Look for organic labeling (*biologico* in Italian) or confirm the farming practices with the person you’re buying from. Although extra virgin olive oil is pricey, the flavor that it adds to a dish makes it well worth the investment.

Good quality vinegar is often found next to olive oil at the grocery store. Alice prefers red wine vinegar for salads. She also keeps champagne, sherry, balsamic, apple cider, and rice wine vinegars in her pantry. If you try a vinaigrette you love, ask about the specific olive oil and vinegar used in the recipe whether you’re in a friend’s home kitchen or at a restaurant.

## A WELL-STOCKED PANTRY

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Alice likes to use spice blends grouped by a particular country and cuisine because of the way they can marry dishes together. She uses Mexican spices like dried chipotle chile in soup, dried ancho chile with lamb or to flavor beans, and toasted cumin seed to make a cumin finishing salt. The warm spices of Morocco—cumin, coriander, turmeric, and cayenne—are key to meat and vegetable braises and tagines. Alice uses saffron from India in fish soups and rice. The sweet spices she uses most often are cinnamon bark, vanilla beans, nutmeg, cloves, and sweet anise seed.

For the best flavor, buy spices whole and toast and grind them yourself. Look for organic labeling and buy in small amounts so that you don't have large amounts sitting unused and losing pungency. Store spices in airtight containers. For salt, look for pure sea salt and keep both a coarse and finer grind on hand. Coarse salt is for seasoning boiling water and brines and fine salt is for seasoning ingredients and finishing dishes. Sea salt contains trace minerals that give it a stronger, saltier, more complex flavor.



The three rices that Alice uses most are Arborio rice from Italy, long-grain brown rice from California, and basmati rice from India. Arborio rice—short-grain with a starchy coating—is used to make a risotto that slowly absorbs liquid, resulting in a creamy-saucy texture. It is a great way to showcase a flavorful stock. Brown rice was the grain that inspired Alice to start incorporating whole grains in her cooking. The long-grain brown rice she uses from Massa Organics is nutty and flavorful—far from the dense health food store brown rice she remembers from college days. Alice first had basmati rice—an aromatic long-grain white rice common in Indian cooking—with Madhur Jaffrey who first boiled the rice and then finished it in the oven with butter and saffron.

Beans are a staple in every part of the world. Alice often cooks a pot of beans on the fire and uses them throughout the week, baking them as a gratin, mixing a variety of beans with vinaigrette for a bean salad, or adding them to pasta for a dish of pasta e fagioli. Cooking with dried beans instead of canned yields a far better flavor and texture and is less expensive. Soak the beans the night before and it will take little effort to have cooked beans, such as chickpeas that can easily be made into a hummus.

There is now a huge variety of dried pastas available at the grocery store. Pasta made of farro, quinoa pastas, egg pastas with yellow noodles from the yolks, and semolina. When Alice and her daughter, Fanny, come home from a trip, the first thing they reach for in the pantry is dried pasta. They cook it with olive oil, garlic, anchovy, and parsley, and call it “coming home pasta”—once they’ve had it, they feel like they are finally home.

### RECIPES

#### GARLIC VINAIGRETTE

ADAPTED FROM *In the Green Kitchen*, PAGE 13

4 SERVINGS



It's essential to learn how to make vinaigrette and you can adapt the recipe to your liking—Alice likes hers with garlic. In France it is common to serve the salad at the end of the meal as a bright finish before the dessert course. Alice sometimes does this after a rich or heavy meal to bring a refreshing component in at the end. She likes a slightly higher amount of vinegar in her vinaigrette. Taste as you go to determine the ratio you prefer.

1 small garlic clove  
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar  
Salt  
Fresh-ground black pepper  
3 to 4 tablespoons olive oil

Put a peeled garlic clove and 2 big pinches of salt in a mortar and pestle and pound into a very smooth paste. The suribachi is perfect to pound the garlic into a paste that will almost disappear into the dressing. Add the vinegar, grind in some black pepper, and taste for the balance of salt and vinegar. Allow to macerate for 10 to 15 minutes, and whisk in olive oil. Taste the dressing with a leaf of lettuce. It should taste bright and lively without being too acidic or too oily; adjust the salt, vinegar, or oil as needed.

#### VARIATIONS

- ♦ In place of the garlic, add a little diced shallot to the vinegar.
- ♦ White wine vinegar, sherry vinegar, a combination of vinegars, or lemon juice can replace some or all of the red wine vinegar.
- ♦ Whisk in a little mustard before you start adding the oil.
- ♦ Heavy cream or crème fraîche can replace some or all of the olive oil.
- ♦ Chop some fresh herbs and stir them into the finished vinaigrette.
- ♦ Use lemon juice instead of vinegar, and add a chopped salted anchovy.

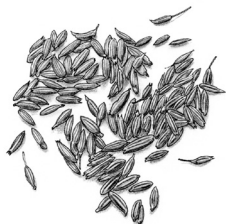
#### CUMIN SALT

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ADAPTED FROM *My Pantry*, PAGE 18

MAKES ABOUT 2 TABLESPOONS



Cumin is one of the spices Alice uses most; it is much more versatile than people imagine. Alice uses it so often, in fact, that it is always among the flavorings on the spice tray she keeps next to her stove. She adds it to sautéed greens and lentils, and uses it to season halved hard-boiled eggs for a quick savory breakfast.

2 tablespoons cumin seeds

1 teaspoon sea salt

Toasting a spice can deepen its flavor. First toast the seeds in a hot cast-iron skillet and shake the pan to move the seeds around for even toasting. You can hear the seeds pop and sizzle as the heat activates the aromas and oils. Once they've browned a bit, transfer the seeds to a mortar and pestle and pound it with the salt until coarsely ground.

### MEXICAN TORTILLA SOUP

ADAPTED FROM *The Art of Simple Food*, PAGE 252

MAKES 2 QUARTS: 4 TO 6 SERVINGS



This is a classic Mexican soup that is brought to the table with a variety of serve-yourself garnishes.

1½ quarts chicken broth

1 chicken breast half (with skin and bones for best flavor)

½ cup peanut or vegetable oil

4 corn tortillas, cut into ½-inch strips

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 Anaheim green pepper, seeded and thinly sliced

½ medium yellow onion, thinly sliced

2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

Salt

2 tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and diced; or 3 small canned whole tomatoes, diced (juice included)

1 dried chipotle chile, seeds removed

½ teaspoon dried oregano

FOR GARNISH:

½ cup chopped cilantro

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6 lime wedges

About 4 ounces crumbled queso fresco or grated Monterey Jack cheese

½ cup peeled and shredded jicama

½ cup julienned radish

1 cubed avocado

Heat the chicken broth to a simmer, then add the half chicken breast. Cook at a bare simmer until the chicken is done, about 20 minutes. Turn off the heat, transfer the breast to a plate, and let cool. Remove and discard the skin and bones and shred the meat. Pour the peanut or vegetable oil into an 8-inch heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat, and then add the tortillas. Fry in small batches until golden brown and crispy. Drain on paper towels and season with salt.

In a large heavy pot, heat the olive oil and add the green pepper, onion, garlic, and salt. Cook until soft, about 5 minutes. Pour in the hot broth, then add the tomatoes, chipotle chile, and additional salt. Bring to a boil and then turn down to a simmer and cook for 30 minutes. Add the shredded chicken meat and oregano and heat through, but do not boil. Taste for salt and adjust as needed.

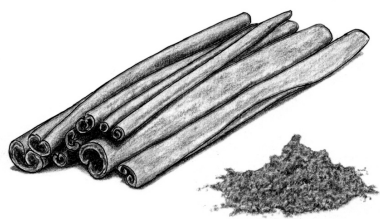
Serve the soup with the crispy tortilla strips and little bowls of the garnishes.

## MOROCCAN-STYLE BRAISED VEGETABLES

FROM *In the Green Kitchen*, PAGE 111

6 SERVINGS

This is a spicy and aromatic stew of chickpeas and tender vegetables. It is delicious served with pita bread, buttered couscous or saffron rice, and spicy harissa sauce.



FOR THE CHICKPEAS:

½ pound (1 cup) dried chickpeas, picked over and soaked overnight

1 small onion, peeled and halved

½ cinnamon stick

1 small dried red chile

2 tablespoons olive oil

Salt

Drain the chickpeas, put them in a medium pot, and add water to cover by 1½ inches. Add the onion, cinnamon stick, chile, olive oil, and a generous pinch of salt. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to maintain a simmer, and cook gently until the chickpeas are tender, about 45 minutes. Taste for salt. Remove from the heat and allow the chickpeas to cool in the cooking liquid.

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### FOR THE BRAISED VEGETABLES:

Salt

½ pound carrots

1 pound baby turnips

1½ pounds butternut squash

4 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

1 teaspoon coriander seeds

A pinch of saffron threads

½ teaspoon ground turmeric

⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper

1 large onion, peeled and diced

2 celery stalks, diced

One 14-ounce can whole tomatoes

2 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped

1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and season with a generous amount of salt. Peel and halve the carrots and cut into halves or quarters. Cook the carrots and turnips in separate batches until just tender, about 5 minutes. Spread the vegetables on a baking sheet to cool at room temperature.

Peel and seed the squash, and cut into 1-inch chunks. Put the squash on a baking sheet, drizzle with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil, and toss to coat evenly. Spread the squash out to an even layer, season with salt, and roast in the oven until tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Set aside at room temperature.

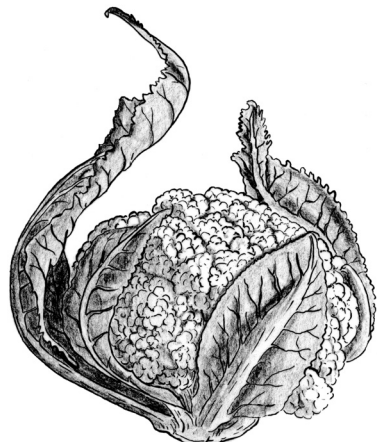
Lightly toast the cumin seeds, coriander seeds, and saffron, and grind to a powder with a mortar and pestle or in a spice grinder. Add the turmeric and cayenne, and stir to combine.

Warm a large straight-sided skillet over medium heat. Add the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil, followed by the onion, celery, and a pinch of salt. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Drain the tomatoes and cut into ¼-inch dice. Add the tomatoes to the skillet and cook for 2 minutes or until the vegetables are tender. Add the spices, garlic, and ginger, and cook for 2 minutes more. Add the chickpeas and the cooking liquid, and bring to a simmer. Add the squash, carrots, and turnips. At this point, there should be a nice amount of broth in the pan—like a chunky soup. If not, add water as necessary. Taste for salt, and simmer for 5 minutes. Serve with buttered couscous or saffron rice, and pass a bowl of harissa at the table.



### TO MAKE HARISSA:

Toast 5 dried ancho chiles on a hot griddle until puffed and fragrant. Put the chiles in a bowl, cover with boiling water, soak for 20 minutes, and drain. Roast, peel, and seed 1 large red bell pepper. In a blender or food processor, purée the drained chiles and peeled pepper with 4 peeled garlic cloves,  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup olive oil, 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar, and salt to taste. Thin with water if desired.



### SPICY INDIAN CAULIFLOWER STEMS

FROM *The Art of Simple Food II*, PAGES 236–237

4 SERVINGS

My office is filled with wonderful interns and assistants who make it possible for me to accomplish all that I do. Although they are not all cooks, food is a frequent topic of their conversation. When we talked about this book, many ideas were tossed around, including this recipe, a northern Indian way of cooking the core and stem of cauliflower—parts that I used to relegate to the compost bucket. Not anymore!

2 large cauliflower cores and stems

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon black peppercorns

Seeds from 1 brown cardamom pod (badi elaichi)

One 2-inch piece cassia

3 cloves

2 teaspoons olive, coconut, or vegetable oil

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

1 teaspoon dried mango powder (amchoor)

Salt

Combine the peppercorns, seeds from the cardamom pod, cassia, and cloves in a heavy-bottomed skillet. Place the pan over medium-high heat and cook, tossing the spices in the pan now and then, until fragrant. Take care not to burn the spices. Let cool and grind to a powder in a spice grinder or using a mortar and pestle. Peel the outer woody parts from the cauliflower cores and stems and cut into large dice or into thick slices. Put a skillet large enough to accommodate the stems over medium-high heat. When hot, add the oil and cumin seeds. Cook until the cumin starts to crackle and then add the stems. Season with salt. Toss, and turn down the heat to low. Cover tightly and cook

until tender. Check and stir, letting all the condensation on the bottom of the lid run back into the pan. If the cauliflower is starting to brown too quickly, turn down the heat (or use a flame tamer). As the cauliflower turns tender, season with the ground spice mixture and the dried mango powder. Stir to coat evenly. When the cauliflower is tender, taste for salt, and adjust as needed.

### VARIATIONS

- ♦ Substitute kohlrabi or broccoli stems for the cauliflower stems.
- ♦ If mango powder is unavailable, finish with the juice of a half lemon.

## SPICED PEARS

FROM *Chez Panisse Fruit*, PAGE 226

6 SERVINGS

This is a recipe reproduced from memory after one of our chefs visited a three-star restaurant in France. Unfortunately, no one seems to remember which chef or which restaurant.

3 cups (one bottle) dry white wine

1½ cups sugar

1 cup water

Zest and juice of 1 lemon

½ vanilla bean, split in half lengthwise

6 firm, not-quite-ripe Bosc, Bartlett, or d'Anjou pears, quartered, cored, and peeled

1 cup heavy cream

Two 3-inch pieces cinnamon stick

10 cloves

1 star anise

1 teaspoon peppercorns

¼ cup honey

4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter

Pour the wine, sugar, and water into a medium-size saucepan and stir over low heat until the sugar is dissolved. Remove the lemon zest with a zester (the kind with tiny holes) or peel off strips of zest with a swivel-bladed vegetable peeler and cut into a fine julienne. Add the zest and lemon juice to the syrup, scrape the vanilla bean seeds into it, and add the bean pieces. Add the pears and simmer gently until they are tender and cooked through, about 30 minutes. Remove the





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pears and set aside. Over high heat reduce the poaching liquid to about 1 cup of thick syrup. Add the cream, lower the heat, and simmer for 5 minutes. Strain the sauce and keep it warm.

Crush the cinnamon sticks, cloves, star anise, and peppercorns together with a mortar and pestle. The spices should be coarsely ground until the pieces are small enough to be edible. Melt the honey and butter together in a large sauté pan. Add the pear pieces, sprinkle with the spice mixture, and sauté over high heat until the pears are browned and the spices are stuck to them. Arrange 3 or 4 pieces of pear on each plate and drizzle with the pear sauce. Serve warm, with a scoop of vanilla ice cream alongside.

### COMING HOME PASTA

Toss hot spaghetti with a heap of minced garlic sautéed gently (not browned) in olive oil, dried chile flakes, a salted anchovy or two, a handful of chopped parsley, and salt to taste. Enjoy with a glass of red wine.

#### LEARN MORE

- ♦ If you want to make your own red wine vinegar, see page 22 of *My Pantry*.
- ♦ Deepen your understanding of the process of cooking dried beans by reading pages 78–79 of *The Art of Simple Food* and then make a pot of beans for the week.

