

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:

Spice & Herb Combinations by Dish		
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:

Spice & Herb Combinations By Cuisine					
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 • Caraway • 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

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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.