



# SPICES & SEASONINGS

Spices play an essential role in creating delicious and flavorful foods. Around the world, these plants are prized for their culinary and medicinal virtues. Spices are aromatic buds, fruits, berries, roots or bark from plants that thrive in tropical regions.

**Allspice** berries have the flavor of a combination of cloves, juniper berries, cinnamon, and pepper. This warming and pungent spice is high in calcium, iron, and manganese. Allspice promotes digestion and removes gases from the upper intestinal tract.

**Anise and Star Anise** are botanically different but have similar flavor. They have warming and moistening properties. Chewing anise seed will sweeten the breath, help induce sleep and alleviate nausea and indigestion. The sweet-licorice taste adds depth to other flavors.

**Cardamom** has a pleasant aroma, reminiscent of pine and eucalyptus. This spice is best purchased whole, in its pods. The seeds can then be removed from within the pods and ground as needed. It is commonly used in curries and rice dishes as well as baked goods and desserts. Cardamom is said to relieve gas, reduce pain, warm the body, and sharpen the mind.

**Cayenne** is very hot and should be used delicately. This spice adds a spark to almost any dish, but it is most commonly used in sauces, soups, and stews. Cayenne produces natural warmth and improves circulation, dissolves mucus and congestion, reduces nerve pain, and stops bleeding.

**Cinnamon** acts as a pain reliever (especially for menstrual discomfort), promotes digestion, and has natural cleansing properties. Cinnamon is good for blood circulation and arthritis, and it has been shown to help people with Type 2 diabetes by improving their ability to regulate blood sugar.

**Cloves** have a warm and aromatic flavor. It has been known to improve memory and create a feeling of protection and courage. The clove is antiseptic when taken internally, while clove oil is a natural anesthetic.

**Coriander** is the seed of the cilantro plant and has a distinctly different flavor than its herbal incarnation. The seed's flavor is warm and spicy, and it has been used as an herbal digestive aid for thousands of years.

**Cumin** has a strong and aromatic spicy taste. This spice is frequently seen in curries from various regions of the world. Health benefits of cumin include strengthening of digestion and stimulation of circulation.

## SALT

### Flake sea salt

is characterized by dry flaky crystals which make for easy sprinkling when finishing a dish.

### Kosher-style salt is

characterized by its distinct, flake-style crystal. It is believed that this style of salt took on the name "kosher" because its texture and shape are useful in the process of koshering meat.

### Pink Himalayan/Celtic/ Sel Gris/Real Salt

These salts are all prized for their high mineral content and are commonly used as finishing salts. Himalayan pink salt is hand-mined from ancient sea salt deposits and is believed to be the purest form of salt available. Sel Gris, (also gray salt or Celtic salt) is harvested from the Atlantic marshes in France. It is gray in color and has a particularly high moisture content. Real Salt is a brand by Redmond that is mechanically harvested from salt mines 300 feet below the surface in Central Utah.

**Sea salt** is produced through evaporation of seawater, usually with little processing, so trace minerals are retained. Sea salt is a naturally occurring source of iodine. The sea salt richest in minerals is grey in color.

**Table salt** is mined from underground salt deposits. Table salt is processed to eliminate trace minerals and contains additives to prevent clumping. Most table salt also has added iodine.

**SACRAMENTO NATURAL  
FOODS CO-OP**



**OPEN DAILY FOR YOU**  
6AM - 11PM • 916-455-2667  
2820 R ST • SACFOOD.COOP



# SPICES & SEASONINGS

**Fennel** has a flavor similar to anise and licorice, but is softer and nuttier. This spice is used to soothe the stomach and intestines, regulate menstrual periods, sweeten breath, and increase lactation in nursing mothers. Fennel has a specific affinity for the bloodstream and builds strong blood plasma.

**Ginger** is one of the world's oldest and most popular spices. This pungent root promotes heat in the body, neutralizes toxins, and aids digestion. It has also been shown to help prevent motion sickness and vertigo. Use ginger powder in baked goods and soups for a rich and warming flavor.

**Mustard** gets its name from the Latin word for "burning" due to its pungent taste. The mildest seed is the white mustard seed, with brown and black seeds being much stronger. Dry mustard powder, a combination of ground brown and white seeds with turmeric and saffron for color, must be mixed with water to develop its pungent flavor.

**Nutmeg** has a warm, sweet, spicy fragrance and flavor. It is often used in cakes, custards, pies, cream soups, milk puddings, and hot drinks—most notably eggnog. Taken with milk, it serves as a tonic for the heart, brain, and reproductive organs. Nutmeg is a seed surrounded by a lacy covering which is the source of the spice mace, usually sold ground.

**Paprika** comes from grinding sweet red pepper pods. It is used in goulash, cheese dishes, cocktail dips, dressings, sauces and soups, and it makes an attractive garnish. As cayenne's sweetest and mildest relative, it is beneficial for stimulation and helps healing and cleansing processes in the body.

**Pepper** can be purchased as whole peppercorns or as ground powder. Black, white, pink and green peppercorns are all berries of the *Piper nigrum* plant; the variation results from the ways they are picked and dried.

**Saffron** threads are the dried stigmas of the saffron flower. Each flower has only three stigmas, which must be hand-picked as soon as the flower opens; that explains why saffron is the most expensive spice in the world. Very little is required to give color and flavor to fish dishes, poultry stews, tomato sauces, sweet breads and cookies. To bring out the strongest color and flavor, grind the threads in a mortar first.

**Turmeric** is a tropical root of the ginger family. It has a delicate, buttery, slightly peppery and mustard-like taste. When added to food it creates a pleasantly warm and rich undertone, as well as a bright yellow color. It is antifungal and anti-inflammatory.

**Vanilla** is the bean of a climbing orchid that grows within 20 degrees of the equator. Its most common incarnation is in the form of vanilla extract, which retains its flavor longer than the whole bean. In aromatherapy, vanilla's scent is used to foster self-confidence, to dissolve anger and frustration, and to access sensuality.

## SPICE BLENDS

**Garam Masala** is a traditional mixture from Northern India, most often combining cumin with coriander seeds, cardamom, black pepper, cloves, mace, bay leaf, and cinnamon.

**Curry Powder** is another type of masala (spice mixture) most commonly used in making savory dishes with a hot and spicy sauce, called "curry." Curry powders contain spices such as turmeric, ginger, pepper, coriander, cumin, and chiles.

**Chili Powder** contains more than ground dried chiles. These powdered blends usually contain garlic, onion, cumin, oregano, salt, and other spices.

**Five-Spice Powder** is a blend of star anise, Szechuan pepper, cassia, fennel seeds and cloves that is used throughout China and Vietnam.

## STORAGE TIPS

Once ground, spices lose their flavor more rapidly than in their whole form. Many whole spices are available in the Co-op's Bulk Department. Store whole spices and grind them in small batches as needed. A coffee grinder works well for this purpose, and you can rid the grinder of pungent odors by grinding some plain uncooked rice between uses.

### Sources:

Dianne Onstad, *Whole Foods Companion*;  
Kami McBride, *The Herbal Kitchen*;  
Elizabeth Lambert Ortiz, *The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Spices & Flavorings*;  
Sharon Tyler Herbst and Ron Herbst, *The Deluxe Food Lover's Companion*

last updated: 9/29/15