

HERBS & SPICES

Herb & Spice Tips

In contrast to herbs, spices are nearly always dried and are mostly ground before using. Pre-ground spices lose their potency quickly, so they should be stored in airtight containers in a cool, dark place and be replaced around every six months. Whole spices retain their flavor longer (for up to five years) and can be used as is or quickly ground with mortar and pestle or an inexpensive coffee grinder (reserve one for spices to avoid coffee flavor).

To get the best flavor from your spices, “toast” them in a dry skillet over low heat, stirring frequently, until they start to release their aromas. Even ground spices can perk up a bit after a quick toast in a skillet, but ones that are too old and faded are generally beyond repair.

Fresh Seasonings

- ❖ In recipes, cut salt in half and add more fresh herbs and spices.
- ❖ When doubling a recipe, herbs and spices should only be increased by one and a half times. Taste, and then add some, if necessary.
- ❖ Add sage, bay leaf and garlic at the beginning of the cooking process as they have a strong flavor. Herbs with more subtle aroma such as basil, parsley and fennel are best when add at the end of the cooking process to preserve their flavor.
- ❖ Delicate aromas can be lost due to overcooking.
- ❖ Cut or chop fresh herbs to expose more surface area. This will release more flavor.

Chart To Convert Dried Herbs To Fresh

1 tsp. dried herbs	=	1 tbsp. fresh herbs
1/8 tsp. garlic powder	=	1 medium clove of garlic
1 tsp. onion powder	=	1 medium onion, finely chopped
1 tsp. ground ginger	=	1 tsp. grated fresh ginger

Allspice – Usually used in ground form, allspice has a flavor like a combination of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. Allspice is used in both savory and sweet dishes.

Anise Seed – Related to parsley, this spice has a mildly sweet licorice flavor.

Basil – Most people are accustomed to using fresh basil in their favorite Italian dishes, but this licorice-like herb is equally at home in Thai coconut curry or a Provencal pistou. Dried basil tastes completely different from fresh, so if you want to add a shot of basil flavor try blending basil with olive oil and storing cubes in the freezer. Aromatic odor, warm sweet flavor, used whole or ground. Used with lamb, fish and vegetable dishes.

Bay Leaf – A pungent flavor. Available as a whole leaf. Good in vegetable and fish soups, tomato sauces and juice. Remove before serving.

Caraway – Their slightly anise flavor works particularly well with rye breads as well as with the kind of sweet and sour dishes favored in Central Europe such as pork and apples or braised red cabbage. Seeds have a spicy smell and aromatic taste. Used in baked goods, cakes, breads, soups, cheese and sauerkraut.

Cardamom – Whole cardamom pods can appear in pilaf rice, curries or Scandinavian baked goods. Ground cardamom loses its flavor.

Cayenne Pepper – A touch of spicy cayenne can add a lot of heat to a dish without radically changing the flavor. It is a mixture of ground chili peppers and can be used in a wide variety of cuisines.

Celery Seed – The wild celery plant these seeds are from are on more and more menus emphasizing regional and local cuisine. The seeds add their pungent flavor to anything from cocktails to coleslaw and can be used whole or ground.

Chives – Leaves are used in many ways. May be used in salads, cream cheese, sandwiches, omelets, soups and fish dishes.

Chervil – Aromatic herb of the carrot family, like parsley but more delicate. Used fresh or dry in salads, soups, egg and cheese dishes.

Chives – Mild flavor of onion. Leaves are used in many ways. May be used in salads, cream cheese, sandwiches, omelets, soups and fish dishes.

Cilantro – This herb is strictly a love it or hate it proposition. Stems are quite sweet and can be added raw along with the leaves while the roots are prized by Thai chefs for curry pastes.

Cinnamon – Cinnamon adds sweetness and heat to sweet and savory dishes alike. Cinnamon sticks are often added whole to coffee, stews, rice, curries or tagines and removed before serving. It is a staple in baked goods – a sprinkle makes even a simple bowl of oatmeal smell and taste great.

Clove – Often paired with cinnamon and nutmeg, cloves are dried flower buds that are sold both ground and whole. They have a warm, sweet flavor that works great with sweet and savory, like clove-studded ham. For a more potent flavor, grind them yourself.

Cumin – Can be experienced in all kinds of dishes from Mexico, India and the Middle East. The toasted seeds can be used whole in dishes or eaten as is, or be ground right before use. Pre-ground cumin loses potency quickly, but can be helped by toasting first in a dry skillet over medium-low heat.

Curry Powder – A number of spices combined to proper proportions to give a distinct flavor to such dishes as vegetables, meat, poultry and fish.

Dill – Both the leaves and seeds of dill are used. Leaves may be used as a garnish or to cook with fish. Leaves or the whole plant may be used to flavor dill pickles. The feathery leaves of the dill plant add light anise flavor to seafood, soups, salads and lots of other dishes. Dill is almost always added at the very last minute. Keep fresh in the refrigerator by storing it in a glass of water with a plastic bag placed over the top.

Fennel – Has a sweet, hot flavor. Both seeds and leaves are used. Seed may be used as a spice in very small quantity in pies and baked goods. Leaves may be boiled with fish.

Ginger – There are many ways to use this peppery root from fresh to dried and ground to pickled and crystallized. Each of these preparations adds unique flavors and textures to everything from stir-fries to roasted meats to classic ginger snaps. An aromatic, pungent root. Sold fresh, dried or ground. May be used in pickles, preserves, cakes, cookies, puddings, soups and pot roasts.

Mace – The dried covering around the nutmeg seed. Its flavor is similar to nutmeg, but with a fragrant, delicate difference. Uses (whole): Pickling, fish, fish sauce, stewed fruit; (ground): baked goods, pastries, and doughnuts. Adds unusual flavor to chocolate desserts.

Marjoram – May be used both green and dry for flavoring soups and ragouts. Can be used in stuffing for all meats and fish.

Mint – Commonly associated with sweet treats, mint lends its cooling, peppery bite to plenty of savory dishes, particularly from the Middle East and North Africa. Perfect for summer-fresh salads or to liven up a sauce, leftover fresh mint can also be used to brew a fragrant tea which is equally tasty served hot or cold.

MSG (Monosodium Glutamate) – is a vegetable protein derivative for raising the effectiveness of natural food flavors.

Mustard – Mustard is great to have around to add heat and a piquant flavor in sauces, dressings, marinades and entrees. Whole mustard seeds are often part of the pickling spices, but are also a key part of many Indian curries where they are toasted in oil first until they pop.

Nutmeg – An aromatic spice with a sweet and spicy flavor. Nutmeg adds warmth and depth to foods but doesn't overpower other ingredients.

Oregano – A pungent herb primarily found in Mediterranean and Mexican cuisines, it is one of the few herbs that survives the drying process relatively unscathed. Use dried oregano for longer stewing or dry rubs, but make sure to use half as much dry as you would fresh since the flavor is so intense. Oregano can also be used as a substitute for its close cousin marjoram. Whole or ground, strong aromatic odor. Used with tomato sauces, pizza and veal dishes.

Paprika – Paprika has too often been relegated to the role of garnish, mostly because of its beautiful rich color. There are all sorts of paprika that can add flavors from mild to hot. A Hungarian red pepper. Bright red in color. May be used in all meat and vegetable salads, in soups (both cream and stock). As a garnish for potatoes, cream cheese, salads or eggs.

Parsley – Formerly relegated to the role of garnish, fresh parsley is coming into its own for its fresh flavor and great health benefits, but dried parsley lacks both flavor and color.

Peppercorn – Along with salt, black pepper is half of a team that is so fundamental to cooking that they get called upon nearly every time you need to spice up a dish. There are all sorts of peppercorns that each offer their own flavors and degrees of heat.

Poppy – The seed of a flower grown in Holland. Has a rich fragrance and crunchy, nut-like flavor. Excellent as a topping for breads, rolls and cookies. Also delicious in buttered noodles.

Red Pepper – Dried red chile pepper sold either ground or in flakes, red pepper works well either added early to dishes that are going to cook for a while or simply shaken on near the very end. Because they vary greatly in terms of heat, taste your red pepper to see just how hot it is.

Rosemary – Can be used fresh or dried for long cooking in soups, meats, stews and more. Use sparingly at first and more if needed.

Sage – Used fresh and dried. May be used in poultry and meat stuffings; in sausage and practically all meat combinations; in cheese and vegetable combinations, as in vegetable loaf, or curry. The flowers are sometimes used in salads.

Shallots – A small type onion producing large clusters of small bulbs. Used like garlic to flavor meats, poultry, sausage and head cheese.

Tarragon – Leaves have a hot, pungent taste. Valuable to use in all salads and sauces. Excellent in tartar sauce. Leaves are pickled with gherkins. Used to flavor vinegar. Experimenting with this anise-like herb in classic French favorites such as Béarnaise sauce, creamy tarragon chicken or fresh vinaigrette can help you learn how to use tarragon to lift flavors without overpowering a dish.

Thyme – One of the most popular herbs in American and European cooking, thyme can be paired with nearly any kind of meat, poultry, fish or vegetable. To use fresh thyme, peel off as many of the leaves as you can from the woody stem by running your fingers along the stem.

Turmeric - A root of the ginger family, grown in India, Haiti, Jamaica and Peru, having a mild, ginger-pepper flavor. Used as a flavoring and coloring in prepared mustard and in combination with mustard as a flavoring for meats, dressings and salads.

Vanilla – An aromatic spice with a warm flavor, vanilla is the seed pod of an orchid. Its available dried or as an extract.

Vinegar – Low percentage natural acid, generally acetic acid. Used as a preservative for all pickling of vegetables and fruit. To give zest or tangy flavor to salad dressings. For meat, fish and vegetables sauces. Different kinds are wine vinegar, white vinegar, cider vinegar and tarragon vinegar.