

# **HERBS & SPICES**

**“Culinary Creations & Wonders”**

**St. Lucie Council of Catholic Women**

**Port Saint Lucie, Florida**

# 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Dill** – 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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. May be used in poultry and meat stuffings; in sausage and practically all meat combinations; in cheese and vegetable combinations, or curry.

**Tarragon** – 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.

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