the epicentre

SPICE

The Epicentre Guidebook

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Edited by Barry Mortin

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Ajwain

Ajwain (pronounced aj'o-wen) is a member of the Umbelliferae family, which has some 2,700 members including dill, caraway and cumin. It is mostly found in Indian cooking, where it is also known as bishop's weed or carom. It is particularly suited to the delicate vegetarian fare found in the state of Gujarat.

Spice Description

Ajwain seeds are used as a spice. The grayish-green seeds are striped and curved (similar to cumin or caraway seeds in appearance), often with a fine silk stalk attached. They are usually sold whole. The seeds are often chewed on their own for medicinal value, tasting bitingly hot and bitter, leaving the tongue numb for a while. Cooking ajowan mellows it somewhat. When crushed, they have a strong and distinctive thyme-like fragrance.

But it's more complex, reminiscent of caraway, celery seed, and cumin. The seed is common in Indian cuisine, often finding its way into starchy foods like breads, legumes, and vegetable dishes. It's an important flavor element in West African dishes as well, especially groundnut soup, and it is included in several of the region's traditional spice blends, including kala masla and berbere.

Bouquet: a pungent thyme/cumin fragrance
Flavour: a harsh thyme-like flavour with a bit of a kick, leaving a milder, pleasant aftertaste
Hotness Scale: 5

Preparation and Storage

Ajwain is usually ground in mortar and pestle, or crushed by rubbing between hands or fingertips before using. When used whole, for parathas or other breads, lightly bruise the seeds first, to release oils and increase flavour. The seeds can be stored indefinitely if kept from light in airtight containers.

Cooking with Ajwain

Ajwain has a particular affinity to starchy foods like savoury pastries and breads, especially parathas. Snacks like Bombay mix and potato balls get an extra kick from ajwain. It is also good with green beans and root vegetables. Lentil dishes and recipes using besan (chick pea flour). It is occasionally an ingredient of curry powder.

Health Benefits

Ajwain seeds contain an essential oil which is about 50% thymol which is a strong germicide, anti-spasmodic and fungicide. Thymol is also used in toothpaste and perfumery. It is used in a steeped liquid form against diarrhea and flatulence. In India the seeds are used as a household remedy for indigestion and colic, and used in poultices to relieve asthma and arthritis. It also has aphrodisiac properties and the Ananga Ranga prescribes it for increasing a husband's enjoyment in his middle years.

Aloo Paratha Bread

2 cups whole-wheat flour
1 tsp. salt
1/2 to 1 cup cold water
1/2 cup ghee or vegetable oil
1 small onion, chopped
1 green chile pepper, minced
1 tsp. coriander seeds, crushed
1 tsp. ajowan seeds, crushed
5 small red new potatoes, boiled
1 tsp. cilantro, chopped

1. In a small bowl, combine flour and salt. Slowly stir in water to form a firm dough. Knead dough for 2 minutes, cover, and let rest for 30 minutes.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons ghee in a large sauté pan over high heat. Add onion, cook until golden. Add chile pepper, coriander seeds, and ajowan seeds, and fry briefly to toast. Remove from heat and stir in potatoes and cilantro. Set aside to cool.
3. Divide dough into 6 portions and form into balls. Pat each ball into a flat disc and fill with 1 or 2 tablespoons potato filling. Pinch dough closed around filling, and roll out into flat circle on a floured work surface, seam side down. Repeat with remaining dough.
4. Fry stuffed dough circles in 1 or 2 tablespoons ghee until golden brown on each side.

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/ajwain/



Aleppo Pepper

Aleppo pepper is a robust, brick-red pepper grown in the around the city of Aleppo (Halab in Arabic) in northwestern Syria, just south of the Turkish border. Also known as Halaby pepper, it is the preferred capsicum for adding the gentle edge of authentic Mediterranean flavour and fragrance. Aleppo pepper is a variety of Capsicum annul. It is used as a spice, particularly in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisine. It starts as pods which ripen to a burgundy color and is then semi-dried, de-seeded, then crushed or coarsely ground. Despite its popularity in Turkey, the pepper's name comes from a Aleppo, an ancient city along the Silk Road in northern Syria, and is grown throughout Syria and Turkey.

Heat and Flavour of Aleppo Pepper

With its high oil content, this dried, seeded and crushed red pepper has a deliciously deep, aromatic flavor, somewhat similar to Ancho chili powder but with a coarser, flakey texture. Aleppo chili offers a nice variation from your usual crushed red peppers, offering a little more tartness, sweet, rich and almost smoky It has a very robust flavor that hits you in the back of your mouth, tickles your throat and dissipates quickly.

The Aleppo pepper has a moderate heat level of about 10,000 on the Scoville scale, with some fruitiness and mild, cumin-like undertones. Its flavor is similar to the ancho chile, but oilier and slightly salty; salt is often used in the drying process. It is fairly mild, with its heat building slowly, with a fruity raisin-like flavor .Be careful when using Aleppo, because its slowly building spice can sneak up on you! In what follows, you'll find two typical uses of Aleppo. It has also been described as having the flavor of sweetness, roundness and perfume of the best kind of sundried tomatoes, but with a substantial kick behind it.

Cooking with Aleppo Pepper

In Syria and Turkey Aleppo Pepper is often used as a condiment and is sprinkled onto foods at the table as is common with salt and pepper in North America. It is traditionally used for many dishes, especially soups, salads, kebabs and fish. Aleppo Pepper is great on grilled meats like chicken breast, steak, or chops. It's also delicious in chili, meat loaf, and sauces, or anywhere paprika is called for but a bit of a stronger flavor is desired. Try mixing Aleppo Pepper with herbs for flavorful roast chicken, tasty pork chops, and robust salads. Aleppo Pepper also makes an attractive sprinkle for potato, chicken and tuna salad and deviled eggs too.

Turkish Chicken Kebabs With Aleppo Pepper

1 1/2 tbsps Epicentre aleppo pepper
1 cup greek yogurt (regular american)
3 tbsps olive oil
2 tbsps red wine vinegar
2 tbsps tomato paste
2 tsps kosher salt
1 tsp black pepper
6 garlic cloves (minced)
1 wedge lemon (2, 1 thinly sliced 1 cut in)
2 1/4 lbs chicken thighs (boneless cut into 1 12 inch pieces)

1. Mix Aleppo peppers with 1 T. warm water, let stand about 5 min, mix into a paste.
2. Combine yogurt, olive oil, red wine vinegar,tomato paste, 2 teaspoons kosher salt and 1 teaspoon black pepper in a bowl, stir in Aleppo paste, then sitr in garlic and lemon

slices; reserve about 1/3 cup of marinade to glaze kabobs with during grill time, then stir in chicken; cover and chill at least 15-30 minutes.

3. Remove chicken from marinade, discard marinade.
4. Place chicken on skewers and grill,baste with reserved marinade, grill until golden brown and cooked through, Turn skewers occasionally 10-12 minute total

Recipe by Maa Dagdevien

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/aleppo-pepper/



Allspice

An essential ingredient for Jamaican jerk paste or seasoning, allspice is native to the Caribbean and the Americas. Allspice takes its name from its aroma, which smells like a combination of spices, especially cinnamon, cloves, ginger and nutmeg. In much of the world, allspice is called pimento because the Spanish mistook the fruit for black pepper, which the Spanish called pimienta. This is especially confusing since the Spanish had already called chillies pimientos. Lets also thank the Spanish for centuries of linguistic confusion created by naming all the natives they met 'Indians'.

Allspice is the only spice that is grown exclusively in the Western Hemisphere. The evergreen tree that produces the allspice berries is indigenous to the rainforests of South and Central America where it grows wild. Unfortunately the wild trees were cut down to harvest the berries and few remain today. There are plantations in Mexico and parts of Central America but the finest allspice comes from Jamaica where the climate and soil are best suited to producing the aromatic berries.

Allspice was used by the Mayans as an embalming agent and by other South American Indians to flavour chocolate. The name 'Jamaica' comes from Xamayca, meaning 'land of wood and water' in the language of the Arawaks. These natives used allspice to help cure and preserve meats, sometimes animals, sometimes their enemies. The allspice cured meat was known in Arawak as boucan and so later Europeans who cured meat this way came to be known as boucaniers, which ultimately became 'buccaneers'.

Spice Description

Dried allspice berries resemble large brown peppercorns. Unripe berries are harvested and sun dried until the seeds in them rattle. They vary in size between 4 to 7 mm (1/8 – 1/4 in) in diameter and are dark brown with wrinkled skins. The outer case contains two dark, hard kidney-shaped seeds. Allspice is available whole or ground. Sometimes the whole berry will be called 'pimento'.

Bouquet: pungent and aromatic, like a combination of nutmeg, clove , ginger and cinnamon.

Flavour: warm and sweetly pungent with peppery overtones.

Hotness Scale: 4

Culinary Uses of Allspice

Jerked meats like pork, chicken and kid reflect the Spanish/Jamaican background of Allspice. It is a particularly popular spice in European cooking, an important ingredient in many marinades, pickling and mulling spices. Many patés, terrines, smoked and canned meats include allspice. A few allspice berries are added to Scandinavian pickled herring, to Sauerkraut , pickles, soups, game dishes and English spiced beef. Traditionally, allspice has been used in cakes, fruit pies, puddings ice cream and pumpkin pie. Some Indian curries and pilaus contain allspice and in the Middle East it is used in meat and rice dishes. It is also used in liqueurs, notably Benedictine and Chartreuse. Allspice can be used as a substitute, measure, for measure, for cinnamon, cloves or nutmeg. Conversely to make a substitution for allspice, combine one part nutmeg with two parts each of cinnamon and cloves.

Attributed Medicinal Properties

Because of its eugenol content, allspice has attributes similar to clove. It is a digestive and carminative. The oil is classed as rubefacient, meaning that it irritates the skin and expands the blood vessels, increasing the flow of blood to make the skin feel warmer. The tannins in allspice provide a mild anesthetic that, with its warming effect, make it a popular home remedy for arthritis and sore muscles, used either as a poultice or in hot baths.

Jerk Chicken

1/2 cup malt vinegar (or white vinegar)
2 Tbsp dark rum
2 Scotch bonnet peppers (or habaneros), with seeds, chopped
1 red onion, chopped
4 green onion tops, chopped
1 Tbsp dried thyme or 2 Tbsp fresh thyme leaves, chopped
2 Tbsp olive oil
2 teaspoons salt
2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
4 teaspoons ground allspice
4 teaspoons ground cinnamon
4 teaspoons ground nutmeg
4 teaspoons ground ginger
2 teaspoons molasses
1 (5 or 6 pound) roasting chicken, cut in half, lengthwise
1/2 cup lime juice
Salt and pepper

Safety note. Scotch Bonnet and Habanero chile peppers are very hot and can cause extreme pain if they come in contact with your eyes. We strongly recommend wearing protective gloves while handling the chilies and the jerk paste.

1. Put vinegar, rum, hot peppers, onion, green onion tops, thyme, olive oil, salt, pepper, allspice, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and molasses into a blender. Pulse until mostly smooth.
2. Place chicken in a large freezer bag, or in a large roasting pan or baking dish. Pour lime juice over the chicken and coat well. Add the jerk paste to the chicken pieces and coat well. Seal the bag or cover the chicken in the pan with plastic wrap. Refrigerate overnight.
3. When you are ready to cook the chicken, remove chicken from the marinade bag or pan. Put the remaining marinade into a small saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Set aside to use as a basting sauce for the chicken. If you want you can reserve a little of the marinade (once boiled for 10 minutes since it has been in contact with raw chicken) to serve with the chicken or to mix with some ketchup and a dash of soy sauce for a serving sauce.

4a Grilling Method - Preheat grill to medium high. Sprinkle chicken halves with salt and pepper. Place chicken halves, skin side down on the grill grates. Cover. Cook for approximately one hour, keeping the internal grill temperature between 350°F and 400°F, turning the chickens occasionally and basting with marinade, until the chicken halves are cooked through. The chicken is done when the juices run clear (not pink) when a knife tip is inserted into both the chicken breast and thigh, about 165-170°F for the breast and 180-185°F for the thigh. Transfer chicken to platter. Tent loosely with foil to keep warm and let stand 15 minutes.

4b Oven Method- Preheat oven to 350°F. Place chicken halves in a rimmed baking pan, skin side up. Roast until chicken halves are cooked through, about 50-60 minutes. The chicken is done when the juices run clear (not pink) when a knife tip is inserted into both the chicken breast and thigh, about 165-170°F for the breast and 180-185°F for the thigh. Transfer chicken to platter. Tent loosely with foil to keep warm and let stand 15 minutes.

Cut chicken into pieces. Serve with black beans and rice.

Serves 6 to 8.

Adapted from a recipe by Elise Bauer

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/allspice-2/



Amchur

The spice amchur is unripe or green mango fruits which have been sliced and sun dried. The name comes from Hindi am, mango. The spice is either whole or ground and sometimes seasoned with turmeric. The mango tree is native to the India-Burma-Malaysia region and is one of the oldest cultivated fruits.

Spice Description

The dried slices are light brown with a rough surface. Ripe mango slices are also dried and are orange brown. Amchur powder is finely ground but with a slightly fibrous texture. It is beige in colour.

Bouquet: Sour-sweet, warm and slightly resinous.

Flavour: Slightly sweet and acidic.

Cooking with Amchur

The use of amchur is confined chiefly to Indian cookery, where it is used as an acid flavouring in curries, soups, chutneys, marinades and as a condiment. The dried slices add a piquancy to curries and the powder acts as a souring agent akin to tamarind. It is particularly useful as an ingredient in marinades, having the same tenderizing qualities as lemon or lime juice. However, where, for instance, three tablespoons of lemon or lime juice are required, one teaspoon of amchur will suffice. Chicken and fish are enhanced by amchur and grilled fish on skewers, machli kabab, is well worth trying.

Health Benefits of Amchur

The mango tree is so old and of such popularity in India and the Far East that it is not surprising that every part of it yields some specific or other. The leaves, the bark, its resin, the flowers, the fruit, the seed, all are utilized. The unripe fruit is acidic, astringent and antiscorbutic, and in the dried condition, amchur is particularly useful for the latter purpose. Of the mango's other properties, its dyeing quality is of interest. In India, cattle are fed on mango leaves and their urine is used as a yellow dye, the active principle in this being xanthone. Needless to say, the fabric treated thus has its own special bouquet.

Awesome Amchur Potatoes!

4 potatoes (peeled and cubed)
11/2 tbsps clarified butter (ghee)
1 tsp Epicentre roasted cumin
2 chile peppers (green, chopped)
1 piece ginger root (1 1 inch piece fresh, finely chopped)
1 tsp chili powder
1 tsp ground coriander

1 tsp amchoor (dried mango powder)
1/2 tsp salt
1 bunch fresh cilantro (chopped)

1. Place the potatoes in a saucepan with enough water to cover. Bring to a boil, and cook 10 minutes, until tender. Drain and allow to cool slightly.
2. Heat the ghee in a large skillet over medium heat. Mix in the green chile peppers and ginger. Season with chili powder, Epicentre roasted cumin and coriander. Stir in the potatoes, and cook about 5 minutes. Season with amchur and salt, and continue cooking about 15 minutes. Garnish with cilantro to serve.

-See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/amchur-mango/



Ancho Chile

The poblano is a mild chili pepper originating in the state of Puebla, Mexico. Dried, it is called a **chile ancho** ("wide chile"). The ripened red poblano is significantly hotter and more flavorful than the less ripe, green poblano. While poblanos tend to have a mild flavor, occasionally and unpredictably, they can have significant heat. Different peppers from the same plant have been reported to vary substantially in heat intensity. A closely related variety is the mulato, which is darker in color, sweeter in flavor and softer in texture.

Preparation methods include: dried, coated in whipped egg (capeado) and fried, stuffed, or in mole sauces. It is particularly popular during the Mexican independence festivities as part of a dish called chiles en nogada, which incorporates green, white and red ingredients corresponding to the colors of the Mexican flag. This may be considered one of Mexico's most symbolic dishes by its nationals. It is also usually used in the widely found dish chile relleno. Poblanos are popular in the United States and can be found in grocery stores in the states bordering Mexico and in urban areas.

Ancho Chicken Tacos with Cilantro Slaw and Avocado Cream

1 pound skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cut into 1/4-inch strips
3/4 teaspoon Epicentre ancho chile powder
1/2 teaspoon garlic salt
1/4 teaspoon Epicentre roated cumin
Cooking spray
1/2 teaspoon Epicentre lime
1/8 teaspoon grated lime rind
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice, divided
1/4 cup light sour cream
2 tablespoons 1% low-fat milk

1/2 ripe peeled avocado, diced
2 cups packaged angel hair slaw
1/2 cup thinly sliced green onions
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon canola oil
1/4 teaspoon salt
8 (6-inch) corn tortillas

1. Heat a large skillet over high heat. Sprinkle chicken evenly with chile powder, garlic salt, and cumin. Coat pan with cooking spray. Add chicken to pan; cook 4 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove chicken from pan.
2. Combine rind, 1 tablespoon juice, and next 3 ingredients (through avocado) in a blender or food processor; process until smooth.
3. Combine remaining 1 tablespoon juice, slaw, onions, cilantro, oil, and salt, tossing to coat.
4. Heat tortillas according to directions. Divide chicken mixture evenly among tortillas. Top each tortilla with about 1 tablespoon avocado mixture and 1/4 cup slaw mixture.

Adapted from Cooking Light The Complete Quick Cook by Bruce Weinstein and Mark Scarbrough. Copyright © 2011. Published by Oxmoor House



Anise

Anise bears a strong family resemblance to the members of the carrot family, that includes dill, fennel, coriander, cumin and caraway. Many of these relatives have been described as having a licorice flavour, to some extent, but anise is the true taste of licorice— its oils are distilled into the flavouring for licorice candy (not from the herb licorice, which has a different taste).

Of the any of the qualities attributed to anise we like what one writer warned: "it stirreth up bodily lust". This accredited to the same spice that could ward off the Evil Eye or keep away nightmares if placed under one's pillow.

Spice Description

Though the roots and leaves are also edible, it is the seeds that we will concern ourselves here. The seeds are grey-green to brownish, ribbed and ovate, measuring 2 -4 mm (.08 -.16 in) long. Some seeds retain the fine stalk that passes through the centre of the fruit.

Bouquet: sweet and fragrant

Flavour: similar to fennel with a mild licorice taste

Hotness Scale: 1

Culinary Uses of Anise

Lighter meats like fish and poultry are enhanced by its delicate but distinct flavors, and it shows up in several soups and stews throughout the Pyrenees region of France.

Not to be confused with star anise, which is generally used in Chinese dishes, anise is primarily associated with cakes, biscuits and confectionery, as well as rye breads. It is used in much the same way as fennel to flavour fish, poultry, soups and root vegetable dishes. Numerous alcoholic drinks and cordials are flavoured with aniseed, particularly French pastis, Pernod and Ricard, Greek ouzo, Spanish ojen, Turkish raki, Italian anesone, Arab arrak and Egyptian kibib.

Health Benefits of Anise

The anise seed is well loved in India as a digestive aid. Brightly coloured, sugar-coated seeds of anise, fennel, and sesame called mukhwas are commonly served after meals to soothe the tongue and tummy after spicy meals—and to freshen breath.

Called "Tut-te See-Hau" by American Indians, meaning "it expels the wind", anise's carminative properties have been known since antiquity. It helps with digestion and sweetens the breath, so it is chewed after meals in parts of Europe, the Middle East and India. It is a mild expectorant, anise often being used in cough mixtures and lozenges. It is also antiseptic, antispasmodic, soporific and a few seeds taken with water will often cure hiccups.

Anise-Almond Biscotti

3 1/4 cups all purpose flour
1 tbsp baking powder
1/3 tsp salt
1 1/2 cups sugar
10 tbsps unsalted butter (melted)
3 eggs
1 tbsp vanilla extract
2 tsps aniseed (ground)
1 cup toasted almonds (coarsely chopped)
1 egg white

1. Position rack in center of oven and preheat to 350°F. Line baking sheet with parchment paper. Sift flour, baking powder and salt into medium bowl. Mix sugar, melted butter, 3 eggs, vanilla extract and ground aniseed in large bowl. Add flour mixture to egg mixture and stir with wooden spoon until well blended. Mix in almonds.
2. Divide dough in half. Using floured hands, shape each dough half into 13 1/2-inch-long, 2 1/2-inch-wide log. Transfer both logs to prepared baking sheet, spacing apart. Whisk egg white in small bowl until foamy; brush over top and sides of each dough log.

3. Bake logs until golden brown (logs will spread), about 30 minutes. Cool logs completely on sheet on rack, about 25 minutes. Maintain oven temperature.
4. Transfer logs to work surface; discard parchment paper. Using serrated knife, cut logs on diagonal into 1/2-inch-wide slices. Arrange slices, cut side down, on same baking sheet. Bake 12 minutes. Turn biscotti over; bake until just beginning to color, about 8 minutes. Transfer to rack and cool. (Can be prepared 1 week ahead. Store in airtight container at room temperature.)

Recipe by by Janet Mercuri

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/anise/



Annatto

Annatto is used both as a spice and a dyestuff. It may be better known to Mexican and Latin markets as achiote or in the Philippines as atsuwete or achuete .In the West it used to colour confectionery, butter, smoked fish and cheeses like Cheshire, Leicester, Edam and Muenster. As an effective natural colouring it is also used in cosmetics and textile manufacturing. It provides a bright and exotic appearance for many kinds of dishes. Yeats wrote "Good arnotto is the colour of fire" (Natural History, 1870). The Mayan Indians of Central America used the bright dye as war paint.

Spice Description

Annatto seeds are brick red, triangular in shape, 3 – 5 mm (1/8" – 3/16"). The seeds are available whole and can often be purchased in a block or paste form at Latin American markets.

Bouquet: slightly peppery with a hint of nutmeg

Flavour: slightly sweet and peppery.

Hotness Scale: 1 -2

Preparation and Storage

Annatto seeds are washed and dried separately from the pulp of the seed pod for culinary use. They may be added directly to a cooking liquid or infused in hot water until the desired colour is obtained and then used for stocks or colouring rice. It is also common to fry the seeds in oil for a few minutes (best done in a covered pan as the hot seeds jump), then discard the seeds and use the oil. Try using one teaspoon of seeds to 4 tablespoons of oil. Annatto seeds should be kept out of light in an airtight container.

Culinary Uses

As mentioned above, annatto is used for colouring cheeses, confectionery, butter and

cheeses. It is more widely used in the Caribbean and Latin America, especially Guatemala and Mexico. The seeds are also particularly associated with Filipino cuisine, in dishes like; ukoy, shrimp and sweet potato fritters; pipian, chicken and pork in an annatto oil sauce; and kari-kari, a brightly coloured vegetable and oxtail stew.

Annatto combines well with cumin, garlic, oregano, and coriander. Typically, it is used to color or flavor food in the form of aceite (oil) or manteca de achiote (annatto lard) in Latin American and Filipino rice dishes, stews, and meats. Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Chinese color batters, Peking style duck, coconut based curries, and marinate pork and fish with annatto. The seeds are fried in oil or lard that becomes a golden orange in color. Then, the seeds are discarded, and this colored oil is used to fry vegetables, rice, chicken, or meats.

Attributed Medicinal Properties

Annatto was once used to control fevers, dysentry and kidney diseases, though is now used mostly as a dye in medical preparations such as ointments and plasters. In India the pulp is used as an insect repellent.

"Puerto Rican Style" Fried Rice

3 cups white rice (refrigerated cooked)
31/2 tbsps annato oil (notes)
11/2 cups pork (leftover cubed cooked)
6 green olives (sliced)
151/2 ozs pigeon peas (drained and rinsed)
2 tbsps red peppers (roasted sweet, minced)
1 tsp garlic powder
11/2 tsps adobo seasoning
1/2 tsp black pepper (ground)
2 sprigs fresh cilantro (garnish)

1. For the annato oil, in a small saucepan, heat 1/4 Cup of oil or lard over low heat until it is hot. Add 3 Tbls. of Annato Seeds, and stir, for one minute. Let this cool, stirring occasionally, while you gather your ingredients. Strain when it is cool.
2. Preheat a non-stick pan or wok, over high heat for one minute.
3. Add to your pan the Annato oil, heat for 30 seconds.
4. Add the pork, and toss this in the hot oil for 30-45 seconds.
5. Add the pigeon peas, the olives, and the peppers, toss for 45 seconds - 1 minute.
6. Add the rice, garlic, Adobo, and the black pepper.Toss and mix, coating all of the rice w/the oil, and breaking up any clumps of rice. Continue tossing it until it is heated through.
7. Plate it up, and garnish with a fresh sprig of Cilantro.

This rice is very hearty, and if you want to make this a meal, just add some extra pork, fry up a few tostones, and serve with potato salad.

Recipe adapted from Food.com

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/annatto-seed/



Basil

The word Basil is derived from the Greek 'basiikon phyton' which means 'kingly herb'. It had been considered "royale" to the French. In India the people worship basil more highly than kings; it is regarded as a sacred herb dedicated to the gods Vishnu and Krishna. In India, Basil was held in such high esteem that it was used in courts to swear upon, and next to the Lotus it was considered one of the most sacred plants. This plant was used as an embalming herb in Ancient Egypt. In some parts of Mexico, Basil is carried in one's pocket to attract money and to keep a lover faithful. For the ancient Greeks and Romans the herb was a symbol of malice and lunacy. They believed that to successfully grow basil, one had to yell and curse angrily while sowing the seeds. In French, semer le basilic, "sowing basil," means "raving".

There are many different types of basil, however the succulent, large-leaved, sweet basil is by far the most popular variety for culinary use. Basil's refreshing, clove and anise-like aroma conjures memories of summer, hardly surprising when one considers how this warmth loving annual thrives in the heat and expires with the first chills of winter.

Dried sweet basil leaves are quite different from the fresh, and although the fragrant, fresh-smelling top notes disappear upon drying, a concentration of volatile oils in the cells of the dehydrated leaves give a pungent clove and allspice bouquet.

Cooking with Basil

Basil's pervading, clove-like aroma makes it such an ideal complement to tomatoes that it is often referred to as 'the tomato herb'. It is interesting to note how flavors across the herb and spice spectrum can have similar attributes, and it is often these degrees of commonality that give us an indication of the breadth of uses they can encompass.

Most salads, especially those with tomato, benefit greatly from the addition of fresh basil. Basil goes well with poultry when used in stuffing, is included in soups and stews and added to sauces and gravies. Fish brushed with olive oil, dusted with freshly ground black pepper, wrapped in foil with a few basil leaves and barbecued, is a simple and effective way to enjoy this versatile herb. Basil is used in pâtés and terrines, where its volatile notes will help counteract the richness of liver and game. A tasty vinegar to have on hand for making salad dressings is made by placing a dozen or more fresh, washed basil leaves in a bottle of white wine vinegar and leaving it for a few weeks.

Basil leaves are best used whole or torn; most cooks advising against cutting the leaves with

a knife, as this tends to dissipate the aroma. To make dried basil taste a little closer to fresh when putting on grilled tomatoes, zucchini or eggplant, mix 1 tsp (5 mL) of basil with 1/2 tsp (2 mL) each of lemon juice, water and oil and 1/8 tsp (0.5 mL) of ground cloves. Let stand for a few minutes, then spread onto halved tomatoes or slices of eggplant before grilling.

Health Benefits of Basil

The above ground portion of this plant is used medicinally. Primary chemical constituents of Basil include essential oil (estragol, eugenol, lineol, linalol), caffeic acid, tannins, beta carotene, and vitamin C. Basil is aromatic, and carminative. It will help to expel flatulence, and ease griping pains in the abdomen. The essential oil obtained from this plant contains camphor. Medicinally, Basil has also been used for various topical applications – as a poultice or salve for insect bites, acne and ringworm; as a gargle or mouthwash for thrush; as a bath herb for increased energy; and as an eyewash for tired eyes. The essential oil of Basil is added to massage oils for sore muscles. And the dried herb was burned as an antiseptic incense. Having a pot of Basil on the table also helps to repel flies & mosquitoes. The juice can be applied to fungal infections. Basil is antispasmodic, carminative, galactagogue, and stomachic. It had been sometimes used for whooping cough.

Tomato-Basil Crostini

crostini
1 pt grape tomatoes (chopped)
1/2 cup fresh basil leaves (chopped)
1 tbsp olive oil
1 tsp vinegar (red-wine)
coarse salt (and ground pepper)
ground pepper (Coarse salt and)

In a bowl, combine tomatoes, basil leaves, olive oil, and red-wine vinegar; season with salt and pepper. Top crostini with topping.

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/basil/



Bay Leaf

The bay tree is indigenous to Asia Minor, from where it spread to the Mediterranean and then to other countries with similar climates. According to legend the Delphi oracle chewed bay leaves, or sniffed the smoke of burning leaves to promote her visionary trances. Bay, or laurel, was famed in ancient Greece and Rome. Emperors, heroes and poets wore wreaths of laurel leaves. It was dedicated to Apollo, the god of music and poetry, and garlands of laurel were given as prizes— hence *poet laureate* and *baccalaureate*.

The bay leaf is oval, pointed and smooth, 2.5 – 8 cm (1 to 3 in) long. When fresh, the leaves are shiny and dark green on top with lighter undersides. When dried the bay leaf is a matte olive green.

Bouquet: Warm and quite pungent when broken and the aromatic oils are released.

Flavour: Slightly bitter and strongly aromatic.

Hotness Scale: 2

Dried leaves should be whole and olive green. Brown leaves will have lost their flavour. Whole leaves are often used in cooking and crushed or ground leaves can be used for extra strength.

Cooking with Bay Leaf

Bay leaves are widely used throughout the world. It may be best known in bouquets garnis or used similarly in soups, sauces, stews, daubes and courts-bouillon's, an appropriate seasoning for fish, meat and poultry. Bay leaf is often included as a pickling spice.

Health Benefits of Bay Leaf

Bay leaf has many properties which make it useful for treating high blood sugar, migraine headaches, bacterial and fungal infections, and gastric ulcers. Bay leaves and berries have been used for their astringent, carminative, diaphoretic, digestive, diuretic, emetic and stomachic properties. Bay Oil, or Oil of Bays (Oleum Lauri) is used in liniments for bruising and sprains. Bay leaf has been used as an herbal remedy for headaches. It contains compounds called parthenolides, which have proven useful in the treatment of migraines. Bay leaf has also been shown to help the body process insulin more efficiently, which leads to lower blood sugar levels.It has also been used to reduce the effects of stomach ulcers. Bay Leaf contains eugenol, which has anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant properties. Bay leaf is also an anti-fungal and anti-bacterial. Bay Leaf has also been used to treat rheumatism, amenorrhea, and colic.

Bay Leaf Beet Soup

4 red beets (trimmed)
2 tbsps extra virgin olive oil
1 red onion (chopped)
2 tbsps leek (chopped)
4 cloves chopped garlic
4 cups vegetable broth
5 bay leaves (broken in half)
1 pinch ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp salt (taste)
1/4 tsp black pepper (ground)

1/8 tsp dried oregano
1/8 tsp dried basil
1 pinch ground cinnamon
1 pinch Epicentre roasted cumin
1 pinch tarragon (dried)

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C). Wrap beets in foil.
2. Bake the beets until tender, about 1 hour; allow to cool, then peel the beets. Cut them into bite-size chunks.
3. Heat the olive oil in a soup pot over medium heat, and cook the red onion, leek, and garlic until the onion is translucent, about 5 minutes. Pour in the vegetable broth, and mix in the beets, bay leaves, cinnamon, salt, black pepper, oregano, basil, cinnamon, cumin, and tarragon. Bring the soup to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer, and cook until the flavors of the bay leaves and spices are blended, 20 to 25 minutes. Pick out bay leaves.
4. Ladle about 1/4 of the beets into a blender, and add soup liquid as needed to fill the blender about 1/4 full. Hold down the lid of the blender with a folded kitchen towel, and carefully start the blender, using a few quick pulses to get the beets and broth moving before leaving it on to puree. Puree the beets until smooth, and pour back into the soup.

Recipe adapted from AllRecipes

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/bay-leaf/



Berbere

This spice blend Berbere is a pronounced as "ber-beray". It is a popular Ethiopian blend with a coarse earthy texture. Berbere adds wonderful spiciness when used as a rub for red or white meats for roasting, grilling, barbecuing or pan-frying. Use it as a paste to flavour stir-fries, soups, casseroles or use it as a base for curry.

Doro Wot (Ethiopian Chicken Stew)

4 tbsp. Ethiopian spiced butter (called *nit'r qibe*), ghee, or melted butter
2 ½ tbsp. minced ginger
5 small red onions, finely chopped
5 cloves garlic, minced
3 tbsp. Epicentre Berbere
1 plum tomato, chopped
¾ tsp. ground cardamom

8 chicken drumsticks
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
4 hard-boiled eggs

1. Heat butter in a 6-qt. saucepan over low heat.

2. Add ginger, onions, and garlic; cook, stirring, until soft, about 30 minutes.

3. Add spice mixture and tomato; cook, stirring, until reduced and darkened, about 15 minutes. Add 4 cups of water, cardamom, and chicken, season with salt and pepper; boil.

4. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook, covered, until chicken is done, about 1 hour.

5. Transfer chicken to a plate; cook sauce until reduced, about 15 minutes. Add eggs and warm. Pour reduced sauce over chicken. Serve with rice or flatbread.

Adapted from Marcus Samuelsson, Yes, Chef (Random House, 2012)

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/berbere



Caraway

Caraway falls into both categories of herb and spice, as it is the seeds that are used primarily, but if you grow it yourself , the leaves and the root are also edible. Caraway has been found in food dating back to 3000 BC making it one of the oldest cultivated spices. The Ancient Egyptians buried their dead with caraway to ward off evil spirits. . Old herbal legends describe caraway's power to keep things from getting lost or stolen. It was used in an ancient love potion, and it was also believed that if you tucked some into your possesions they would be protected from theft.

Spice Description

Caraway is a biennial that takes two years for full life cycle, after it produces seeds it dies off. It can reach a height of 30-80cm with foliage that is frilly like the foliage of carrots. It has a thick root, similar to a parsnip and hollow fluted stems. The clusters of small flowers can be white, yellow or green. It is an easily grown plant that prefers a well drained soil and a sunny spot. After it flowers, the seed produced are brownish in colour, are ribbed and slightly cresent shaped.

Cooking with Caraway Seeds

We suggest adding the seeds after a dish is cooked, as a long simmer may turn the flavour

bitter. It has a sweet warm aroma with a flavour similar to aniseed and fennel. It figures prominently in the cuisines of Germany, Austria, eastern Europe and Scandinavia. It seems to have a special affinity for apples, pork and sausages.The spice seems to counteract the fattiness of pork, duck and goose. It is an essential taste in sauerbraten, sauerkraut and rye bread. Smoked and skimmed milk cheeses from Austria, Germany, Hungary Holland and Scandinavia contain whole seed. There are medieval recipes for caraway flavoured cheese that are still in use today. (Dutch cheese).

There are many liquers are flavoured with caraway (Kummel, Akuavit gins and Schnapps). It can also be used in cakes cookies, soups, omelets, rice and pasta dishes, cheese spreads and vegetable dishes. It is also an important addition to Tunisian harissa and some blends of garam masala

Health Benefits of Caraway

The primary medical benefit of caraway is its effect on digestion. It is a carminative which means it helps with gas and digestion. It is helpful to chew caraway seeds after a heavy meal. It has been used for colic as it is a light sedative and it can be used to settle a queasy stomach (antispasmodic).

Sautéed Chard and Onions with Caraway

3 tbsps olive oil
1/4 in root (to 1/2-inch wide slices, to stem)
2 onions (sliced 1/4-inch to 1/2-inch wide slices, root to stem)
salt
1 lb chard (center ribs removed, leaves roughly chopped)
1 tbsp honey
1 tsp caraway seeds
1/4 tsp celery seed
1/2 tsp black pepper
2 tsps sherry wine vinegar

1. Heat the olive oil in a large sauté pan over high heat until the oil is almost smoking. Add the onions and toss to coat with oil. Sauté for 10-12 minutes stirring often, until the onions are soft and browned on the edges. Sprinkle with salt while the onions are cooking.
2. Add the chard to the onions and mix well with tongs. Once the chard wilts, 2 to 4 minutes, add the honey, caraway seeds, celery seeds, and black pepper. Toss well to combine and cook for another 2-3 minutes, stirring often. Add the vinegar right before serving.

Recipe by Simply Recipes

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/caraway/



Cardamom

An Asian shrub in the ginger family, cardamom (elettaria cardamomum) grows long, pointed leaves off a large stem, similar to tulips or iris. Its tropical flower makes way for plump seed pods that contain the pungent, oil-rich cardamom seeds. The pods are picked by hand when green and dried in the sun. They're sold green, which are not processed beyond natural drying, and white, which are treated with sulfur dioxide to mute the flavors.

Black cardamom (afromomum subulatun) has a completely different smoky, peppery quality because it's dried over open, smoky flames. It can hold up well to, and is preferred for, heavier, spicier dishes than the green or white pods.

Bouquet: Pungent, warm and aromatic.

Flavour: Warm and eucalyptine with camphorous and lemony undertones. Black cardamom is blunter, the eucalyptus and camphor suggestions very pronounced.

Hotness Scale: 2

Cooking with Cardamom

The pods can be used whole or split when cooked in Indian substantial meals — such as pulses. Otherwise, the seeds can be bruised and fried before adding main ingredients to the pan, or pounded with other spices as required. Keep the pods whole until use. The pod itself is neutral in flavour and not generally used, imparting an unpleasant bitter flavour when left in dishes. It features in curries, is essential in pilaus (rice dishes) and gives character to pulse dishes. Cardamom is often included in Indian sweet dishes and drinks. At least partially because of its high price, it is seen as a 'festive' spice. Other uses are; in pickles, especially pickled herring; in punches and mulled wines; occasionally with meat, poultry and shellfish. It flavours custards, and some Russian liqueurs. It is a flavouring for Arab and Turkish coffee which is served with an elaborate ritual.

Health Benefits of Cardamom

A stimulant and carminative, cardamom is not used in Western medicine for it own properties, but forms a flavoring and basis for medicinal preparations for indigestion and flatulence using other substances, entering into a synergetic relationship with them. The Arabs attributed aphrodisiac qualities to it (it features regularly in the Arabian Nights) and the ancient Indians regarded it as a cure for obesity. It has been used as a digestive since ancient times. A medicinal (perhaps aphrodisiac) cordial can be made by macerating seeds in hot water.

Baked Cinnamon-Cardamom Apples

6 apples (medium, cores and bottoms left intact)
6 tbsps unsalted butter (at room temperature)
11/2 tsps ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp salt

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Place the cored apples snuggly in a shallow baking dish and set aside.
2. In a small bowl, combine the butter, cinnamon, cardamom and salt. Using the back of a spoon, mash the mixture together until well combined.
3. Fill each hallowed apple core with 1 tablespoon of the seasoned butter, packing it down. Bake on the center rack for 40 to 45 minutes until the apples are soft and easily pierced with a knife. Let cool for 15 minutes before serving.

Recipe by Amy Pennington

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/cardamom/



Chai Spice Baking Blend

Traditional warming spices of chai masala combine in this blend by The Epicentre. The dominant note of cardamon, blends with clove, cinnamon and back pepper adding a touch of heat. Ready to add a whole new dimension to your favourite recipes! Transform your muffins, banana bread, cupcakes and cookies. Add to warm cereals, pancakes and waffles.

Epicentre Chai Spiced Shortbread Cookies

Makes about 24 cookies

1/2 cup cornstarch
1/2 cup icing sugar
1 cup flour
2 tablespoons Epicentre Chai Baking blend
3/4 cup soft butter

1. Sift together the cornstarch, icing sugar,flour and spice. Blend in butter until a soft smooth dough forms.
2. Shape into 1" balls and chill 30 -60 minutes. Place 1 1/2" apart on a cookie sheet and flatten slightly with a floured fork.
3. Bake 300' for 15-20 minutes. Transfer to a rack and cool.

Recipe by Barbara McGee



Chicken Love

A gentle and tasty seasoning blend for poultry luvin' flavour by The Epicentre. Mild ancho chiles with hungarian and spanish paprikas are lightened with lemon peel and traditional poultry seasoning herbs. Rub under the skin where possible and inside the cavity of a whole bird. Allow flavours to penetrate for a few hours or overnight.

Spiced Chicken Wings

1 lb chicken wings
1-2 tbsp Epicentre Chicken Love

1. Cut wings at the joints and remove wing tips.
2. Cover and refrigerate from 30 minutes up to 2 days to allow flavours to penetrate.
3. Remove from refrigerator and bring to room temperature. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Prepare an oven pan with greased foil or place wings on a rack and cook for aprox. 25 to 35 min until juices run clear.

The Epicentre Italian Wedding Soup

3 or more Italian sausages (hot, medium or mild)
1 tablespoon Epicentre Chicken Love spice blend
5 3/4 cups of chicken broth
2 cups of finely sliced escarole or spinach
A pinch or two of lemon zest
1/2 cup of orzo or small pasta
Grated Parmesan and chopped fresh basil for garnish

1. Slice Italian sausages into meatball sized pieces and brown in a little olive oil with a sprinkling of chicken love to taste. Set aside
2. Pour broth into large saucepan over high heat and drop in your "meatballs"
3. Stir in escarole or spinach, lemon zest and orzo. Return to a boil and reduce heat to medium. Slow cook for ten minutes until pasta is tender (stirring frequently)

Serve sprinkled with Parmesan and a little fresh basil



Chimichurri

Used to season grilled meat and may be used as a marinade and finishing sauce as well as in salad dressings. Chimichurri is that wonderful, fresh sauce that brightens anything it comes in contact with. Traditionally made with olive oil, lots of fresh parsley, lemon, garlic and shallots, it's most often used as a sauce on grilled meats and fish, but keeping a little container of it in the refrigerator allows you to dress up even the most basic of leftovers. Popular among many Latin and South American countries, chimichurri is easy to make and it's essentially season-less: You can find lemons and parsley pretty much year-round. If you're a vegetarian, never fear: try this sauce on grilled veggies, tofu, stir it into egg salad or your favorite whole grains.

To use Epicentre Chimichurri: slightly moisten with warm water (just enough to to rehydrate the dry herbs) and allow to sit for 5 minutes. Add olive oil to obtain the desired consistency and an optional spritz of lemon juice.

Fresh Chimichurri Sauce

2 cloves garlic
1 1/2 cups fresh cilantro
1 1/2 cups fresh flat-leaf parsley
1/4 cup distilled white vinegar
1/4 cup olive oil
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon cayenne or a pinch of crushed red pepper flakes
extra olive oil for pasta

1. Put herbs, spices, and garlic in the food processor and pulse until chopped. With motor running, drizzle in first the olive oil, then the vinegar until smooth and emulsified.

   Alternately, chop all ingredients on a cutting board, mixing in the liquid at the end.

Grilled Flank Steak with Chimichurri

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 teaspoons Epicentre Chimichurri
1/2 teaspoon Epicentre Harissa
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 (1 1/2-pound) flank or skirt steak, trimmed
Cooking spray

1. Prepare grill.
2. Combine first 4 ingredients in a small bowl, rub steak with spice mixture. Marinate in refrigerator for 30 minutes to 8 hours.

3. Place steak on grill rack coated with cooking spray, grill the steak 6 minutes on each side or until desired degree of doneness.

Chimichurri Marinade for Pork or Lamb:

2 tablespoons avacodo oil
1 tablespoon Epicentre Chimichurri
2 garlic cloves, minced
1-2 tablespoons lime juice :

1. Prepare grill.
2. Combine all ingredients in a small bowl, rub pork or lamb with spice mixture. Marinate in refrigerator for 30 minutes to 8 hours.
3. Grill or roast lamb or pork to appropriate doneness.

Recipe courtesy of Firehouse Gourmet



Chinese Five-Spice

The Chinese Five Spice blend is a staple in Chinese cooking, and is often used in a technique called "flavour potting", where meat is steeped in a rich sauce and cooked for long hours. The spices included here are the most commonly used in five-spice powder, with the sweet tones of star anise, cloves and cinnamon with the bite of Szechwan pepper, all married together wtih ground fennel seeds. Some recipes use them in equal proportions, others use more of one to heighten a specific flavor. Generally though, Chinese five spice is dominated by the aroma and flavour of star anise. It is used in many Asian recipes, its sweet tangy flavour goes well with greasy meats like pork and duck. Stir-fried vegetables are enhanced by sprinkling about a teaspoon of Chinese five-spice over them when cooking. Add a little salt and it makes an excellent spice rub for chicken, duck, pork and seafood.

Chinese Five-Spice Chicken Wings with Cilantro Dipping Sauce

For the five-spice wings

40 chicken wing pieces, or 20 whole chicken wings
2 tablespoons Epicentre Chinese five-spice powder
1 tablespoon Epicentre Aleppo pepper or cayenne pepper
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the creamy cilantro dipping sauce

1/3 to 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves
1/4 cup light or regular sour cream

1/4 cup mayonnaise
1/4 cup plain yogurt
Juice 1/2 lemon (or why not try lime?)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Make the five-spice wings

1. Preheat oven to 500°F (260°C).
2. If you have whole chicken wings, cut off the wing tips and cut the wings in half at the joint. Discard the wing tips or freeze them for making stock.
3. Place the wings in a large bowl. Sprinkle five-spice powder and cayenne on the wings, add a generous pinch or two of salt, and about 15 grinds of black pepper. Rub the mixture into all the wings until all the rub clings to the chicken.
4. Line the wing pieces up on a rimmed baking sheet so the side of the wing that has the most skin is facing up. Roast until cooked through, browned, and crisp, about 25 minutes. (If you prefer a wing that's every iota as crisp underneath as on top, bake the wings on a wire rack situated on the baking sheet. If you prefer a wing that has one side smudged with a sort of gooey crispness from sitting in a teensy puddle of its juices during roasting, leave the wings on the baking sheet.)

Make the creamy cilantro dipping sauce

5. Pulse the cilantro, sour cream, mayo, yogurt, and lemon or lime juice in a food processor. (Or, lacking a processor, whisk them together.) Taste and add a judicious amount of salt and black pepper and pulse again. Cover and toss it in the fridge while the wings do their thing in the oven.

Serve the wings

6. Pile the wings on a platter and serve 'em hot along with the cold creamy cilantro dipping sauce on the side.

Recipe by Dave Lieberman

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/chinese-five-spice-recipe/



Chipotle Chile

Chilpotle, which comes from the Nahuatl word ***chilpoctli*** meaning "smoked chili" is a smoke-dried jalapeño. It is a chili used primarily in Mexican and Mexican-inspired cuisines, such as Mexican-American and Tex-Mex.

Varieties of jalapeño vary in size and heat. In Mexico, the jalapeño is also known as the cuaresmeño and gordo. Until recently, chipotles were largely found in the markets of central and southern Mexico. As Mexican food became more popular abroad, especially in the upper nations of North

America, jalapeño production and processing began to expand into northern Mexico to serve the southwestern United States, and eventually processing occurred in the United States and other places such as China.

Chipotles, often a key ingredient, impart a relatively mild but earthy spiciness to many dishes in Mexican cuisine. The chilis are used to make various salsas. Chipotle can be ground and combined with other spices to make a meat marinade, adobo.

Chipotles have heat and a distinctive smoky flavor. The flesh is thick, so the chiles are usually used in a slow-cooked dish rather than raw. Whole chipotles are added to soups, stews or in the braising liquid for meats. They can also accompany beans or lentils.

Chicken Flautas with Lime Sour Cream

Makes about 18 flautas

Peanut or canola oil, for frying
2 tablespoons butter
3 cups cooked and shredded chicken (recipe below, or use store-bought rotisserie chicken)
1 teaspoon paprika (regular or smoked)
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon garlic powder
3/4 teaspoon Epicentre roasted cumin
1/2 teaspoon Epicentre chipotle powder
1/2 teaspoon Epicentre chili powder
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
24 corn tortillas, 6 to 7 inches in diameter (a few might tear when rolling)
2 cups crumbled queso fresco cheese
1/2 cup sour cream
Juice of two limes
Salsa verde and guacamole, for serving

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Fill a Dutch oven or cast iron pot with a few inches of peanut or canola oil and heat on medium-high until it reaches 375°F.

2. While the oil is heating, melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat. In a large mixing bowl, combine the chicken, paprika, kosher salt, garlic powder, cumin, chipotle, chili powder, cayenne, and a few generous grinds of black pepper. Add the chicken to the skillet and cook until warmed through. Adjust any seasonings to personal taste (note: you want the flavors to be bold in the chicken mixture—i.e. spicy, smoky, salty—because they won't be as strong once you add the cheese and tortilla.)

3. Heat a stack of three to four tortillas in the microwave for about 20 seconds to soften. Place two tablespoons of chicken mixture into the middle of the tortillas and sprinkle with crumbled queso fresco. Tightly roll each tortilla and secure with a toothpick(s).

Using long tongs, carefully add each tortilla to the oil, gently clamping closed for a moment to help the shell set. Adjust the heat as necessary to maintain the temperature while frying. Cook the tortillas until very crisp and light golden in color, about 1-2 minutes. Shake off the excess oil back into the pot before placing the flauta on a paper-towel lined sheet pan.

4. Continue rolling and cooking the tortillas in batches, making sure to return the oil to 375° in between batches. Hold the cooked flautas in preheated oven to keep warm until finished frying.

5. **For the lime sour cream**, stir together the sour cream and lime juice. Adjust amount of lime, if desired. Keep in refrigerator until ready to serve. Serve the flautas with lime sour cream, salsa verde, and guacamole.

6. For easy poached and shredded chicken: Place four chicken breasts in a deep, flat-sided skillet. Add enough cooking liquid (I used a mix of chicken stock and beer) to completely cover the chicken and sprinkle in a few teaspoons of kosher salt. Bring the liquid to a gentle boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low (try to maintain the temperature of cooking liquid to between 170°F and 180°F) and simmer until the chicken reaches the internal temperature of 160°F, about 15 minutes.

7. Place hot/warm chicken in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with beater attachment. Turn the mixer on low, then increase power to medium (watch out for splashing!) and mix until chicken is shredded to desired texture, about 30 seconds. (If you don't have a stand mixer, just shred the chicken using the two fork method, or my favorite, the "bear claw.") Return chicken to the poaching liquid to cool. Strain before using. Yields approximately 3 cups shredded chicken.

Recipe by Nealey Dozier

Cinnamon



Both members of the laurel family, cinnamon (cinnamomum verum) and cassia (cinnamomum aromaticum) are combined into what we recognize as cinnamon. The actual flavors are similar but are easily distinguishable when tasted side by side.

The spices come from the bark of Asian evergreen trees, harvested with much skill and tradition from trees 25 years or older. When the trees are still moist from seasonal rains, the inner bark is carefully stripped with special tools using techniques that have been passed down through many generations.

Cassia bark is much stronger than true cinnamon. In stick form, it's thicker and almost impossible to grind. True cinnamon bark is much finer and crumbles easily in the hand.

Bouquet: sweet and fragrant
Flavour: warm and aromatic
Hotness Scale: 3

Cooking with Cinnamon

Cassia and cinnamon have similar uses, but since it is more delicate, cinnamon is used more in dessert dishes. It is commonly used in cakes and other baked goods, milk and rice puddings, chocolate dishes and fruit desserts, particularly apples and pears. It is common in many Middle Eastern and North African dishes, in flavouring lamb tagines or stuffed aubergines. It is used in curries and pilaus and in garam masala. It may be used to spice mulled wines, creams and syrups. The largest importer of Sri Lankan cinnamon is Mexico, where it is drunk with coffee and chocolate and brewed as a tea. Cinnamon is a crucial element in many spice blends, including curries, barbecue rub, jerk rub, mulling spice, mole, and of course, pumpkin pie spice.

Health Benefits of Cinnamon

Recent studies have determined that consuming as little as one-half teaspoon of Cinnamon each day may reduce blood sugar, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels by as much as 20% in Type II diabetes patients who are not taking insulin. It relieves nausea and vomiting, and, because of its mild astringency, it is particularly useful in infantile diarrhea.

Cinnamon French Toast

1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 tbsp ground cinnamon
450 grams white sandwich bread (loaf))
113 grams unsalted butter (softened)
3 cups whole milk
6 large eggs
1/4 tsp table salt
2 tsps vanilla extract

1. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Whisk the cinnamon and sugar together in a small dish. Line two large baking sheets with foil. Place the bread slices on the baking sheets in one layer. Spread each slice of bread with 1 teaspoon of butter, then sprinkle each slice with one teaspoon of the cinnamon-sugar mixture. Toast the trays of bread in the oven until the bread is golden, and until the cinnamon-sugar makes a caramelized crunch on top, for about 7 to10 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 375 degrees and let the toast cool slightly.
2. Generously butter a 9×13-inch baking dish. (You might have a little butter leftover but I wanted to build in some leeway in case, understandably, you weren't buttering your bread with precise teaspoon measurements!) Cut two slices of the cinnamon toast in half horizontally. Arrange the cinnamon toast down in two rows along the width of the pan.

Begin with the bottom half of one slice of toast, then fan 7 more slices in a row, finishing with the top half of the slice. This ensures that those served the end pieces of the baked French toast are not stiffed with thin slices! Repeat with another 7 full slices and 1 halved slice of cinnamon toast in the second row. Whisk the milk, eggs, salt and vanilla in a medium bowl and pour evenly over cinnamon toast in baking dish. Let sit for 15 minutes (or overnight, if you're preparing this ahead of time) so that the custard absorbs a bit.

3. Before baking, if you've got any extra cinnamon-sugar (you'll likely have a tablespoon or two), sprinkle it over the French toast. Bake for 30 minutes, until puffed and golden and until no liquid seeps out of the toasts when they are nudged about in the pan. Cut into squares and serve plain, or with a dollop of plain yogurt and fresh berries, or maple syrup.

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/cinnamon/



Cloves

The word 'clove' is from the Latin word for 'nail' – clavus. Cloves are the immature unopened flower buds of a tropical tree. When fresh, they are pink, dried, they turn to a rust-brown colour. Measuring 12-16 mm (1/2"-5/8") long, they resemble small nails, with a tapered stem. The large end of the clove is the four-pointed flower bud.

Bouquet: Warm, pungent and aromatic

Flavour: Sweetly pungent, astringent and strongly aromatic.

Hotness Scale: 5

Cooking with Cloves

Cloves can easily overpower a dish, particularly when ground, so only a few need be used. Whole cloves are often used to "stud" hams and pork, pushing the tapered end into the meat like a nail. A studded onion is frequently used to impart an elusive character to courts-bouillons, stocks and soups. Cloves are often used to enhance the flavour of game, especially venison, wild boar and hare. They are used in a number of spice mixtures including ras el hanout, curry powders, mulling spices and pickling spices. Cloves also figure in the flavour of Worcestershire sauce. They enjoy much popularity in North Africa and the Middle East where they are generally used for meat dishes, though rice is often aromatized with a few cloves.

Health Benefits of Cloves and Clove Oil

Folklore says that sucking on two whole Cloves without chewing or swallowing them helps to curb the desire for alcohol. Essential oil of clove is effective against strep, staph and pneumomocci bacterias. Contemporary herbalists recommend cloves for digestive complaints and its oil for toothache. Cloves are said to have a positive effect on stomach ulcers, vomiting, flatulence, and to stimulate the digestive system. It has powerful local antiseptic and mild anesthetic actions.

Dentists have used clove oil as an oral anesthetic. They also used it to disinfect root canals. Clove oil still is an active ingredient in several mouthwash products and a number of over-the-counter toothache pain-relief preparations. Cloves kill intestinal parasites and exhibits broad anti-microbial properties against fungi and bacteria, thus supporting its traditional use as a treatment for diarrhea, intestinal worms, and other digestive ailments. Like many culinary spices, Cloves helps relax the smooth muscle lining of the digestive tract. And finally, eating cloves is said to be aphrodisiac.

Clove-Studded Roasted Pineapple

pineapple (about 4 lbs)
16 cloves
1/4 cup peanut oil (or grapeseed)
2 cups light brown sugar
1/2 cup superfine sugar
16 peppercorns (crushed)
3/4 tsp pepper (quatre epices, a mixture of, cloves, nutmeg, and ginger)
6 Epicentre star anise

1. For the syrup, put 4 cups water into a pan and add all the ingredients. Slowly bring to a boil over gentle heat, stirring occasionally.
2. Simmer over medium heat to reduce by three-quarters, to make a thick syrup. Set aside.
3. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Using a serrated knife, cut a 1 1/4-inch slice from the top, removing the leafy fronds, and a 3/4-inch slice from the base of the pineapple to enable it to stand upright.
4. Now working from top to bottom and following the curve of the fruit, remove the peel. To remove the little black "eyes," and create an attractive finish at the same time, cut a spiral groove, 1/4 inch deep, around the entire fruit. Stud the flesh evenly all over with the cloves.
5. Heat the oil in an oval pan (or one that will take the whole fruit) until very hot, then add the pineapple and lightly color all over.
6. Transfer the pineapple to a medium-small roasting dish, standing it upright. Baste the pineapple with the reduced syrup and roast in the oven for 35 to 40 minutes, depending on the ripeness of the fruit, basting it every 5 minutes or so with the syrup, and keeping it upright.
7. Let the roasted pineapple stand for 10 to 15 minutes before serving, basting from time to time with the syrup.
8. To serve, lie the pineapple on its side and cut into slices, about 1/2 inch thick. Arrange in a serving dish, retaining the star anise for decoration, and serve just warm.

Recipe by Michel Roux

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/cloves



Coriander

Among ancient doctors, coriander was known to Hippocratic, and to Pliny who called it coriandrum for its 'buggy' smell, coris being a bug; or perhaps because the young seed resembles Cimex lectularius, the European bed-bug. The seed is generally sold dried and in this state is apt to split into halves to reveal two partially hollow hemispheres and occasionally some internal powdery matter. Coriander is available both whole and ground. The fresh leaves of the plant are called ***cilantro*** and are used as an herb.

Bouquet: Seeds are sweet and aromatic when ripe. Unripe seeds are said to have an offensive smell. The leaves have a distinctive fragrance.

Flavour: The seeds are warm, mild and sweetish. There is a citrus undertone similar to orange peel. The leaves combine well with many pungent dishes from India, Mexico and the Middle East.

Hotness Scale: 1

Cooking with Coriander

The commonest use of coriander seed is in curry powders, where it is the bulkiest constituent, often rough ground to give a crunchy texture. The seeds can also used in stews and soups. They blend well with smoked meats and game and feature in traditional English black pudding recipes and Italian mortadella sausage. Coriander is an ingredient of garam masala, pickling spices and pudding spices and is used in cakes, breads and other baked foods.

Coriander with cumin is a common combination and features in falafel and in the Egyptian appetizer dukka, which consists of those spices plus sesame seeds, hazelnuts, salt and pepper, roasted and crushed. Coriander goes well with ham and pork, especially when orange is included. It enhances fish dishes and, with other spices, may form a delicious coating for spiced fish or chicken, rubbed into the scored flesh and grilled. Try frying a few seeds with sausages to add an unusual flavour. Coriander complements chili and is included in many chili recipes, such as harissa, the hot North African red pepper sauce. It may be added to cream or cottage cheese. The leaves are always used fresh. They feature in Spanish, Middle Eastern, Indian, Oriental and South American cookery. They are sprinkled like parsley on cooked dishes, minced or puréed in sauces, soups and curries, especially bhuna. Both seeds and leaves can be used in salads. In Thailand the root of the coriander plant is used to flavour meats and curries.

Coriander Oil Benefits

Coriander oil is an aromatic stimulant, a carminative (remedial in flatulence), an appetizer and a digestant stimulating the stomach and intestines. It is generally beneficial to the nervous system. Its main use is in masking foul medicines, especially purgatives, where it has anti-griping qualities.

Recent studies have supported its use as a stomach soother for both adults and colicky babies. Coriander contains an antioxidant that helps prevent animal fats from turning rancid. It also contains substances that kill meat-spoiling bacteria and fungi. These same substances in Cilantro also prevent infection in wounds. Coriander has been shown to improve tummy troubles of all kinds, from indigestion to flatulence to diarrhea. Weak coriander tea may be given to children under age 2 for colic. It's safe for infants and may relieve their pain and help you get some much-needed sleep.

Cilantro and Coriander contain substances that kill certain bacteria and fungi, thereby preventing infections from developing in wounds. Sprinkle some coriander Seed on minor cuts and scrapes after thoroughly washing the injured area with soap and water. Intriguing new studies suggest that coriander has anti-inflammatory effects. Since the pain of arthritis is cause by inflammation coriander oil may help you.

Coriander and Cumin Rubbed Pork Chops

1/2 tsp salt
1 tbsp Epicentre roasted cumin
1 tbsp ground coriander
3 cloves minced garlic
2 tbsps olive oil (divided)
2 boneless pork loin chops
black pepper (ground, taste)

1. Mix the salt, cumin, coriander, garlic, and 1 tablespoon olive oil to form a paste. Season the pork chops with salt and pepper, and rub with the paste.
2. Heat the remaining olive oil in a skillet over medium heat, and cook the pork chops about 5 minutes on each side, to an internal temperature of 145 degrees F (63 degrees C).

Recipe from AllRecipes

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/coriander



Cumin

Cumin grows in most hot countries, especially India, North Africa, China and the Americas. The spice is especially associated with Morocco, where it is often smelt in the abundant street cookery of the medinas.

Classically, cumin symbolised greed; thus the avaricious Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, came to be known privately as '***Cuminus***'

Cumin is the seed of a small umbelliferous plant. They resemble caraway seeds, but are lighter in colour and unlike caraway, have minute bristles hardly visible to the naked eye.

They are available dried, or ground to a brownish-green powder. Cumin is freely available in the West, although it is not a traditional European spice.
Bouquet: Strong, heavy and warm. A spicy-sweet aroma.
Flavour: Pungent, powerful, sharp and slightly bitter.
Hotness Scale: 3

Cooking with Cumin

Cumin is used mainly where highly spiced foods are preferred. It features in Indian, Eastern, Middle Eastern, Mexican, Portuguese and Spanish cookery. It is an ingredient of most curry powders and many savoury spice mixtures, and is used in stews, grills – especially lamb – and chicken dishes. It gives bite to plain rice, and to beans and cakes. Small amounts can be usefully used in aubergine and kidney bean dishes.

Cumin is essential in spicy Mexican foods such as chile con carne, casseroled pork and enchiladas with chili sauce.

In Europe, cumin flavours certain Portuguese sausages, and is used to spice cheese, especially Dutch Leyden and German Munster, and burned with woods to smoke cheeses and meats. It is a pickling ingredient for cabbage and Sauerkraut, and is used in chutneys.

In the Middle East, it is a familiar spice for fish dishes, grills and stews and flavours couscous – semolina steamed over meat and vegetables, the national dish of Morocco. Zeera pani is a refreshing and appetising Indian drink made from cumin and tamarind water. Cumin together with caraway flavours Kummel, the famous German liquer.

Health Benefits of Cumin

Cumin is stomachic, diuretic, carminative, stimulant, astringent, emmenagogic and antispasmodic. It is valuable in dyspepsia diarrhoea and hoarseness, and may relieve flatulence and colic. In the West, it is now used mainly in veterinary medicine, as a carminative, but it remains a traditional herbal remedy in the East. It is supposed to increase lactation and reduce nausea in pregnancy.

It has been shown to be effective in treating carpal tunnel syndrome, as well as diarrhea, indigestion, and morning sickness. Cumin also shows promise as a natural way to increase breast size. Used in a poultice, it relieves swelling of the breast or the testicles. Cumin stimulates the appetite.

Cumin-spiked Tofu

12 ozs extra (firm organic tofu)
1 tsp Epicentre roasted cumin
1 tbsp Epicentre garam masala
6 cloves garlic (crushed then chopped)
3 tbsps olive oil
1/4 tsp salt (fine grain sea)
1 tbsp lemon juice (freshly squeezed)
71/2 ozs greek yogurt

1. Unwrap the tofu. Dry it off by patting and pressing with a few paper towels. Cut the tofu into slabs roughly the size of a business card, with the thickness of a pencil.
2. In a wide, shallow rimmed dish (a tart pan or pie dish works great) whisk together all the remaining ingredients. Place the tofu in the marinade in a single layer and gently coat the tofu with the yogurt. Cover and refrigerate for (at least) a few hours. I sometimes leave it marinating for a few days, cooking the tofu when needed.
3. In a grill pan, or on a grill, cook the tofu (retaining some of the yogurt slather on each piece) over medium heat until the tofu is cooked through and the surface of the tofu has nice color. Flip once along the way. If the pan/grill is too hot the outside of the tofu will overcook before the inside is hot, so be mindful of this.

Serve over this carrot salad. *Serves about 4.*

Recipe from 101 Cookbooks

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/cumin/



Curry Powder

Curry powder is a blend of up to 20 different herbs and spices, including the commonly used: cardamom, chiles, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, fennel, fenugreek, mace, nutmeg, pepper, poppy seeds, sesame seeds, saffron, tamarind and tumeric (which gives curry its characteristic golden color). In Indian cooking curry is freshly ground each day (making it far more flavorful and pungent than the mixes sold in the store), and comes in "standard" and "Madras" (hot) versions.

Curried Pumpkin Soup

4 sweet apples such as Macintosh
1tbsp butter
1 onion, finely chopped
2 crushed garlic cloves

1 tbsp Epicentre madras curry powder
1 tbsp Epicentre roasted ground cumin
1 tbsp Epicentre garam masala (optional)
14 oz can pumpkin puree (not pie filling)
4 cups chicken broth or bouillion
1 cup of water
1 tsp granulated sugar
light sour cream or yogurt

1. Peel and chop apples, about 3 cups. Melt butter in a large saucepan set over medium heat. Add onion, garlic, and spices. Sauté, until onion is soft and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Stir in apples, pumpkin, broth, water and sugar. Bring to a boil, stirring often. Cover, reduce heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 25 minutes.
2. Puree soup in a food processor or blender. Return to saucepan and reheat, covered, over low heat. Whisk sour cream or yogurt into soup to taste, starting with 1/2 cup. Or swirl a little in centre of each serving. Covered and refrigerated, soup will keep well for up to 3 days and freezes well.

Potatoes Madras

3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 1/2 pounds potatoes, cut into 1/2 inch dice
2 1/2 cups cauliflower florets
1 large onion, sliced
2 cloves garlic, crushed
1 tablespoon Epicentre Madras curry powder
1/2 tablespoon ground ginger
4 ounces dry red lentils
1 (14.4 ounce) can whole tomatoes, chopped
1 1/4 cups vegetable stock
2 tablespoons malt vinegar
1 tablespoon mango chutney
salt and pepper to taste
chopped fresh parsley for garnish

1. Warm oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Stir in potatoes, cauliflower, onion, and garlic; cook until the garlic begins to brown.
2. Stir in the curry powder and ginger, and cook about 3 minutes. Stir in lentils, tomatoes, vegetable stock, vinegar, and chutney. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Cover, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the lentils are tender, about 20 minutes. Top with parsley.

Recipe adapted from AllRecipes



Fenugreek

An annual in the bean family, fenugreek (trigonella foenum-graecum) grows like peas, with a thick stem, yellow sweet-pea–like flowers, and long, horn-shape seed pods that contain square yellow seeds. The seeds must be ground to release their maple-curry-nutty flavor.

Fenugreek sprouts and leaves have a similar, but sweeter, flavour than the seeds, are eaten as a vegetable, and mixed into dough, beans, and stews.

Blue Fenugreek (trigonella caerulea) is related, with a similar but subtler flavor and aroma, found in the alpine mountain regions of southeastern Europe. The leaves, seeds, flowers are used dried, and the herb is used extensively in alpine cheeses and breads of the region.

Bouquet: Warm and penetrating, becoming more pronounced when the seeds are roasted. Ground, they give off a 'spicy' smell, pungent, like an inferior curry powder which would probably contain too much fenugreek.

Flavour: Powerful, aromatic and bittersweet, like burnt sugar. There is a bitter aftertaste, similar to celery or lovage.

Hotness Scale: 2

Cooking with Fenugreek

The major use of fenugreek is in curry powders, figuring in many mixtures, especially vindaloo and the hot curries of Sri Lanka. It is an ingredient of Panch phoron, the Indian five-spice mixture. In home-made powders, the amount used can be controlled, but in cheap bought powders it often overpowers. When fish is curried, particularly strong-tasting fish such as tuna and mackerel, fenugreek is frequently included in the spice mixture.

Fenugreek is used in many spice blends, breads (Ethipoian Injera), confectionery (for its maple qualities), and pickling. The seed can also be ground into flour and used as a thickener.

Many chutneys and pickles incorporate it and it gives a tangy aroma to vegetables. The leaves, both fresh and dried, are used in meat curries, dhal and vegetable dishes and chutneys. The seeds are an ingredient of the Middle Eastern confection halva. Flour mixed with ground fenugreek makes a spicy bread. In India the roasted ground seeds are infused for a coffee substitute or adulterant. A tea can be made by infusing teaspoon of seed with two cups of water for five minutes.

Health Benefits of Fenugreek

Fenugreek is a digestive aid. As an emollient it is used in poultices for boils, cysts and other complaints. Reducing the sugar level of the blood, it is used in diabetes in conjunction with insulin. It also lowers blood pressure. Fenugreek relieves congestion, reduces

inflammation and fights infection. Fenugreek contains natural expectorant properties ideal for treating sinus and lung congestion, and loosens & removes excess mucus and phlegm.

In the East, beverages are made from the seed to ease stomach trouble. The chemical make-up is curiously similar to cod liver oil, for which a decoction of the seed is sometimes used as a substitute. Many other properties are ascribed to it in India and the East and not surprisingly include aphrodisiac.

Methi Murgh (Fenugreek Chicken)

1/4 cup cooking oil
5 lbs chicken (cut into 8 pieces skin removed and discarded)
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 cinnamon stick
1 tsp Epicentre black cardamom
4 whole cloves
1 onion (sliced thin)
1 tbsp garlic paste
4 chile peppers (green, halved lengthwise)
1/2 cup spinach (chopped fresh)
1/2 cup fenugreek leaves (chopped fresh)
1 tbsp Epicentre fenugreek leaves (dried)
1/2 tsp ground turmeric
1/2 tsp ground red pepper
salt (taste)
1 cup water
1/2 tsp Epicentre garam masala

1. Heat the oil in a pressure cooker over medium heat; brown the chicken pieces evenly on all sides, about 5 minutes. Remove from cooker and set aside. Add the cumin seeds, cinnamon stick, cardamom pod, cloves, onion slices, ginger-garlic paste, and green chile peppers to the pressure cooker and cook until the onions are golden brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir the spinach, fresh fenugreek leaves, dried fenugreek leaves, turmeric, red pepper, and salt into the mixture and cook until the spinach and fenugreek leaves begin to wilt and darken in color, about 5 minutes. Pour the water over the mixture and return the chicken pieces to the pressure cooker; bring to a boil for 2 to 3 minutes.
2. Fasten the lid on the pressure cooker; cook until the chicken is tender, about 30 minutes. Release pressure fully and remove the lid; sprinkle the garam masala over the dish. Cook and stir until the liquid thickens, 3 to 5 minutes. Serve hot.

Recipe for AllRecipes

-See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/fenugreek/



Galangal

There are several varieties of galangal, all similar to ginger, but with a little zing of mustard heat and a floral or citrus essence. Native to Indonesia, galangal is favored in the cuisines of Vietnam (phõ soup), Thailand, and Malaysia.

Cooking with Galangal

The use of greater galangal is confined to local Indonesian dishes such as curries. Although known in Europe since the Middle Ages, galangal is now used only in Far Eastern cookery from Indonesia, IndoChina, Malaya, Singapore and Thailand.

Like ginger, galangal is a 'de-fisher' and so appears frequently in fish and shellfish recipes often with garlic, ginger, chilli and lemon or tamarind. Laos powder is more important than kencur and, as well as with fish, is used in a wide variety of dishes such as sauces, soups, satays and sambals, chicken, meat and vegetable curries.

Although used in the often searingly hot Indonesian cookery, laos powder enhances dishes such as chicken delicately spiced with fennel and lemon grass and gently cooked in coconut milk. However, these mild dishes are usually accompanied by vegetable or fish sambals fiery with chili.

Health Benefits of Galangal

Resembling ginger in its effects, galangal is an aromatic stimulant, carminative and stomachic. It is used against nausea, flatulence, dyspepsia, rheumatism, catarrh and enteritis. It also possesses tonic and antibacterial qualities and is used for these properties in veterinary and homeopathic medicine. In India it is used as a body deodorizer and halitosis remedy. Both galangals have been used in Europe and Asia as an aphrodisiac for centuries. Gerard (1597) says: 'they conduce to venery, and heate the too cold reines (loins)'.

Tom Yum Kung (Thai sour and spicy shrimp soup)

3 cups chicken stock
1 tbsp lime juice
1 stalk lemongrass (sliced thinly, tough outer leaves and bulb removed)
11/2 tsps Epicentre galangal powder
3 lime leaves (thinly sliced, or one large strip of lime peel)
3 garlic cloves (minced)
11/2 chili pepper (de-seeded and sliced, as hot as you like or mild)
1.bell pepper (sliced, any color)
1/3 cup cilantro
2 tbsps fish sauce
11/2 cups shiitake mushrooms (sliced thinly, or any small mushroom)

12 shrimp (shells removed)
11 ozs coconut milk

1. Pour stock and lime juice into a deep cooking pot.
2. Place lemongrass in a food processor and process until finely grated. Add to pot. The bulb can be thrown into the pot for additional flavor (remove before serving).
3. Add the galangal powder to the pot.
4. Add garlic, chilies, peppers, and Kaffir leaves (or lime peel). Bring to a mild boil.
5. Add the mushrooms and shrimp. Gently simmer 'til shrimp is pink.
6. Turn down the heat to low then add the coconut milk and fish sauce. Taste to adjust seasonings, adding more chilies and/or fish sauce (instead of salt) as desired.
7. Serve in bowls with cilantro sprinkled over. And on the side, steamed jasmine rice and quarters of fresh lime.

Recipe adapted from Food.com

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/galangal/



Garam Masala

Garam masala is a wonderfully aromatic blend of spices from India. Garam means "hot" or "heating" and masala means "spice blend". The "hot" is not necessarily referring to the kind of heat we find in hot chillies but to the fact that the spices are first toasted then ground. Another explanation we've heard is that the amalgamated effect of the spices in garam masala increases body temperature, a pleasant warm glow you might feel after eating a dish flavoured with it. It does however usually include some black pepper and cinnamon or cassia which carry some heat.

Many of the spices used in garam masala are more familiar in the West as spices for desserts or baking: cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, and mace for example. The addition of other spices may include black and/or green cardamom, bay leaves, cumin, coriander, fennel, and possibly caraway.

Different regions use different combinations and the blends will also vary from household to household where proportions may vary according to whatever dish it is being used to season. Whole garam masala is used more in north Indian cooking, especially meat dishes. A whole garam masala could include cinnamon sticks, bay leaves, cloves, cardamom pods, mace blades, and black peppercorns. These are fried in hot oil or ghee before other ingredients such as meat, onions, garlic, or ginger are added. Heating these spices releases a wonderful aroma that fills your house and stimulates appetites.

Ground garam masala is usually added at the end of cooking or may even be added to a dish after serving. We've heard it referred to as a "pepping up" spice. Only buy small quantities at a time, or if you choose to make your own, do it in small batches as it loses flavour after a few months and the flavour balance changes, with cloves becoming more predominant than is desirable. Use garam masala as directed in recipes but don't stop there. It is excellent for flavouring many dishes, not just Indian fare. Sprinkle some over a squash before roasting or a bowl of pumpkin soup before serving, or onto corn on the cob that has been brushed with oil or butter.

Chana Masala

1 tbsp vegetable oil
2 onions (minced)
1 clove garlic (minced)
2 tsps fresh ginger
1 green chili peppers (fresh, minced)
1 tbsp ground coriander
1/2 tsp Epicentre Reshampati Chile (or cayenne)
1 tsp ground turmeric
2 tsps Epicentre Roasted Cumin
1 tbsp amchur powder
2 tsps Epicentre Sweet Smoked Paprika
1 tsp Epicentre garam masala
2 cups tomatoes (chopped small or 1 15-ounce can of whole tomatoes with their juices, chopped small)
2/3 cup water
4 cups chickpeas (or 2 (15-ounce) cans chickpeas, drained and rinsed)
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 lemon juiced

1. Heat oil in a large skillet. Add onion, garlic, ginger and pepper and sauté over medium heat until browned, about 5 minutes.
2. Turn heat down to medium-low and add the coriander, cumin, cayenne, turmeric, cumin seeds, amchur, paprika and garam masala.
3. Cook onion mixture with spiced for a minute or two, then add the tomatoes and any accumulated juices, scraping up any bits that have stuck to the pan.
4. Add the water and chickpeas. Simmer uncovered for 10 minutes, then stir in salt and lemon juice.

Eat up or put a lid on it and reheat it when needed. Curries such as this reheat very well, later or or in the days that follow, should it last that long.

Recipe adapted for Smitten Kitten

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/garam-masala/



Ginger

Ginger is native to India and China. It takes its name from the Sanskrit word *stringa-vera*, which means "with a body like a horn", as in antlers.

It has been important in Chinese medicine for many centuries, and is mentioned in the writings of Confucius. It is also named in the Koran, the sacred book of the Moslems, indicating it was known in Arab countries as far back as 650 A.D. It was one of the earliest spice known in Western Europe, used since the ninth century.

It became so popular in Europe that it was included in every table setting, like salt and pepper. A common article of medieval and Renaissance trade, it was one of the spices used against the plague.

In English pubs and taverns in the nineteenth century, barkeepers put out small containers of ground ginger, for people to sprinkle into their beer — the origin of ginger ale. In order to 'gee up' a lazy horse, it is the time honoured practice of Sussex farmers to apply a pinch of ginger to the animal's backside..

Spice Description

Although often called "ginger root" it is actually a rhizome. It is available in various forms, the most common of which are as follows:

Whole raw roots are generally referred to as fresh ginger. A piece of the rhizome, called a 'hand'. It has a pale yellow interior and a skin varying in colour from brown to off-white.

Powdered ginger is the buff-coloured ground spice made from dried root.

Preserved or 'stem' ginger is made from fresh young roots, peeled and sliced, then cooked in a heavy sugar syrup. The ginger pieces and syrup are canned together. They are soft and pulpy, but extremely hot and spicy.

Crystallized ginger is also cooked in sugar syrup, then air dried and rolled in sugar.

Pickled ginger has the root sliced paper-thin and pickled in a vinegar solution. This pickle is known in Japan as gari , which often accompanies sushi, and is served to refresh the palate between courses.

Bouquet: warm, sweet and pungent.
Flavour: Fiery and pungent
Heat Scale: 7

Cooking with Ginger

Fresh ginger is essential to Asian and oriental cookery. It is used in pickles, chutneys and curry pastes and the ground dried root is a constituent of many curry powders.

Tender young ginger can be sliced and eaten as a salad. Sometimes the roots will produce

green sprouts which can be finely chopped and added to a green salad.

In the West, dried ginger is mainly used in cakes and biscuits, especially ginger snaps and gingerbread. Ginger is also used in puddings, jams, preserves and in some drinks like ginger beer, ginger wine and tea.

Pickled ginger is a delicious accompaniment to satays and a colourful garnish to many Chinese dishes.

Preserved ginger is eaten as a confection, chopped up for cakes and puddings, and is sometimes used as an ice cream ingredient.

Health Benefits of Ginger

Ginger has long been ascribed aphrodisiac powers, taken either internally or externally. It is mentioned in the **Karma Sutra**, and in the Melanesian Islands of the South Pacific it is employed 'to gain the affection of a woman'. Conversely, in the Philippines it is chewed to expel evil spirits.

Ginger is a known diaphoretic, meaning it causes one to sweat. It was recorded that Henry VIII instructed the mayor of London to use ginger's diaphoretic qualities as a plague medicine. Ginger is most commonly known for its effectiveness as a digestive aid. By increasing the production of digestive fluids and saliva, it helps relieve indigestion, gas pains, diarrhea and stomach cramping.

Ginger's anti-inflammatory properties help relieve pain and reduce inflammation associated with arthritis, rheumatism and muscle spasms. Ginger's therapeutic properties effectively stimulate circulation of the blood, removing toxins from the body, cleansing the bowels and kidneys, and nourishing the skin. Other uses for ginger include the treatment of asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory problems by loosening and expelling phlegm from the lungs. It may also be used to help break fevers by warming the body and increasing perspiration.

Ginger, Garlic & Chili Shrimp

For the Brine

1/4 cup kosher salt

2-1/2 tablespoons sugar

2-1/2 tablespoons Epicentre chili powder

4 cups water

2 pounds shrimp, peeled and deveined (defrosted)

For Cooking

1/4 cup vegetable oil

One 4-inch x 1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and finely chopped (about 1/4 cup)

4 large garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped (about 2 tablespoons)

4 teaspoons sugar

1. In a medium bowl, combine the salt, sugar, chili powder and water. Whisk until the sugar and salt are dissolved. Drop in the shrimp and let stand at room temperature for 20 minutes.
2. Heat the oil in a 12-inch sauté pan (preferably nonstick) over medium heat. Add the ginger and garlic and cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, for 1 minute. Add the sugar and continue stirring until the garlic is pale gold, 1-2 minutes more. Do not let the garlic turn dark brown.
3. Drain the shrimp in a colander, and immediately add to the pan. Increase the heat to medium-high and cook, stirring constantly, until the shrimp are pink and barely firm, another 3-4 minutes. Serve immediately with rice.

Recipe adapted from Once upon a chef

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/ginger/

Harissa

This chili-based condiment has a definite kick and is widely used in Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian cooking. It is served as a side dish in which to dip pieces of grilled and barbequed meats, stirred into soups and stews or served as a condiment with couscous. Harissa is sometimes added to a purée of fresh tomatoes and offered as a dip for kebabs or snacks. When added to natural yogurt, harissa is an excellent marinade for pork and chicken.

Grilled Green Beans With Harissa

1 lb green beans (trimmed)
2 tbsps vegetable oil
1 tbsp red wine vinegar
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 tsp Epicentre Harissa

1. Preheat a grill or large grill pan to high.
2. Prepare a large bowl of ice water; set aside. Fill a large saucepan halfway with water and bring to a boil over high heat. Season the water generously with salt. Add the beans and blanch until just crisp-tender, 2 to 4 minutes.
3. Drain, and plunge the beans into the ice water for 2 minutes to stop the cooking. Drain the beans and pat dry with kitchen towels.
4. Put the beans in a large bowl and toss with the vegetable oil. Using tongs, arrange in a single layer on the grill and cook until lightly charred, 3 to 5 minutes.
5. Whisk together the vinegar, olive oil, harissa, and l/2 teaspoon salt in a large bowl.
6. Add the warm beans, toss, and serve warm or at room temperature.

Recipe from Ted Allen

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/harissa/



Herbes de Provence

Herbes de Provence, or Provençal herbs, is a traditional blend of aromatic herbs that flourish in hills of southern France during the hot summer months. Used by the handful when fresh, Herbes de Provence is also good using dried herbs. Bay leaf, thyme, fennel, rosemary, chervil, oregano, summer savory, tarragon, mint, and marjoram are some of the herbs typically used.

Orange zest is sometimes included as is lavender, though the lavender is less traditional and was added more for the benefit of tourists who saw lavender fields as almost emblematic of the Provençe region. Traditional or not, the addition of lavender is an nice addition to the blend.

Herbes de Provence is a good addition to any dish from the Mediterranean region and is especially good mixed with olive oil to coat chicken, fish, tomatoes or chunks of potato for roasting, adding to a pizza sauce or sprinkled over game or kabobs before roasting. It's also used for seasoning salads, sauces and cheeses, as well as soups and stews. Try rubbing the blend on whole turkey or the breast before roasting.

Rub beef, lamb or veal with olive oil, season with salt and pepper, then press the herb blend into the meat. Sear the meat in a very hot skillet on both sides, then remove and finish roasting in a 300 degree oven until cooked to your preference. When grilling add a pinch or two of herbes de Provence to the coals when they are hot. Herbes de Provence is often sold in traditional terracotta jars which make both a charming gift and effective storage container.

Roasted Asparagus with Herbes de Provence

1 bunch asparagus (fresh, spears trimmed)
2 tbsps olive oil
1 tbsp Epicentre Herbes de Provence
sea salt
pepper

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil.
2. Toss the asparagus with olive oil, Herbes de Provence, salt, and pepper. Spread the asparagus onto the baking sheet in a single layer.
3. Roast in preheated oven until tender and lightly browned, about 12 minutes.

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/herbes-de-provence/



Juniper

Juniper is widely distributed throughout the northern hemisphere and its birthplace is obscure. It is found in Europe, North Africa, North America and northern Asia. The main commercial producers are Hungary and southern Europe, especially Italy.

Because of its air-cleansing piney fragrance, the foliage was used as a strewing herb to freshen stale air and the Swiss burned the berries with heating fuel in winter to sanitize stale air. Gin, the alcoholic drink that gets its unique flavour from juniper berries, is named from an adaptation of the Dutch word for juniper, "geneva".

Spice Description

Initially hard and pale green, juniper berries ripen to blue-black, become fleshy and contain three sticky, hard, brown seeds. When dried, the berries remain soft but if broken open one will find the pith surrounding the seeds is easily crumbled.

Bouquet: Fragrant and flowery, combining the aromas of gin and turpentine.

Flavour: Aromatic, bittersweet and piny.

Hotness Scale: 1

Culinary Uses of Juniper

Juniper berries perform a quite unique role, by contributing as much to the character of food through their 'freshening' ability, as they do by way of their specific taste profile.

As well as flavouring a dish, juniper cuts the gaminess of game, reduces the fatty effect of duck and pork and perks up a bread stuffing. The strong hearty flavour of juniper goes well with strong meats, such as game.

Pork chops, roast leg of lamb, veal, rabbit, venison and wild boar are all enlivened with a hint of juniper. Juniper berries blend well with other herbs and spices, especially thyme, sage, oregano, marjoram, bay leaves, allspice and onions and garlic.

Goulash and Sauerkraut often feature a juniper taste, as do some home-pickled meats like salt beef, salt pork and ham. Generally juniper can well be used in any dish requiring alcohol. Fruit dishes, such as apple tart and pickled peaches, also harmonize with this flavour.

Health Benefits of Juniper

Medicinal preparations involving juniper use the green unripe berries, whose properties are more pronounced than those of the ripe fruits. Juniper berries and leaves are used to support healthy kidney and urinary tract function, and to promote healthy blood pressure.

Today, Juniper Berries are beneficial in treating infections, especially within the urinary

tract, bladder, kidneys, and prostate. Their antiseptic properties help remove waste and acidic toxins from the body, stimulating a fighting action against bacterial and yeast infections.

Juniper Berries also help increase the flow of digestive fluids, improving digestion and eliminating gas and stomach cramping. As a diuretic, Juniper Berries eliminate excess water retention contributing to weight loss. Juniper Berries' anti-inflammatory properties are ideal for relieving pain and inflammation related to rheumatism and arthritis.

In addition, Juniper Berries are beneficial in reducing congestion, as well as treating asthma and colds. Juniper Berries make an excellent antiseptic in conditions such as cystitis. But the essential oil present in this herb is quite stimulating to the kidney nephrons, and so Juniper should be avoided by those suffering from kidney disease.

DIY Gin

2 cups vodka
2 tbsps Epicentre Juniper berries
1/2 tsp coriander seeds
1 tsp chamomile
1/2 tsp Epicentre lavender
3 Epicentre cardamom pods (broken)
1 bay leaf
4 allspice berries
1 piece grapefruit peel (two 4 inch, with no pith)

1. Combine the vodka and juniper berries in a sealable glass jar and steep for 12 hours.
2. Add coriander, chamomile, lavender, cardamom, bay leaf, allspice, and grapefruit peel. Seal jar and shake, then let steep for an additional 36 hours.
3. Strain out solids through a strainer lined with cheesecloth, then strain through cheese cloth again into desired bottle. Store at room temperature for up to one year.

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/juniper



Kaffir Lime Leaves

Kaffir Lime leaves are a member of the citrus family responsible for the distinctive lime-lemon aroma and flavour that are an indispensable part of Thai and, to a lesser extent, Indonesian cooking.

Spice Description

The leaves of the kaffir lime tree are a dark green color with a glossy sheen. They come in two parts: the top leaflet is lightly pointed at its tip and is attached to another leaflet beneath that is broader on its upper edge. The size of the leaves can vary quite a bit, from less than an inch to several inches long.

Bouquet: The leaves and rind have a perfume unlike any other citrus, sometimes called mysterious or haunting. There is a combined lemon/lime/madarin aroma but clearly an identity of its own.

Flavour: same as bouquet.

Hotness Scale: 1

Cooking with Kaffir Lime Leaves

Kaffir lime leaves are precious to many Thai dishes, from soups and salads to curries and stir-fried dishes. They blend blend with lemon grass and lime juice in tom yam to give the soup its wholesome lemony essence. In soupy dishes, add the leaves whole or torn into smaller pieces, using them as one would bay leaves to flavour broth or stew.

Salads or garnishes require fresh leaves. Dried leaves cannot be substituted. The leaves, when young and tender, are finely shredded and added to salads and sprinkled over curries for a burst of flavour.

Being rather thick, they must be cut very fine, like threads, and the thick mid-rib removed. To sliver kaffir lime leaves finely, stack three to four leaves of similar size together and slice them very thinly with a sharp knife. It is faster to cut diagonally , which gives the hands better leverage, or roll a few leaves at a time into a tight roll before slicing. If fresh kaffir lime leaves are not available, use the tender new leaves of lime, lemon or grapefruit. They won't have the same fragrance but are preferable to using dried kaffir lime leaves in some dishes.

When making a soup or stock, whole fresh or dried leaves may be added, as they are removed after cooking. Finely chopped fresh or crumbled dry kaffir lime leaves are used in dishes like tom yum, strir fries and curries, especially those containing coconut cream.

The flavour combines well with basil, cardamom, chiles, cilantro, cumin, curry, lemon grass, galangal, ginger, mint, tamarind,and coconut milk. Though the juice is seldom used in cooking, the peel of the fruit, with its high concentration of aromatic oils, is indispensable in many curry pastes and is one reason why Thai curries taste refreshingly unique.

Health Benefits of Kaffir Lime

The essential oils in the fruit are incorporated into various ointments, and the rind is an ingredient in medical tonics believed to be good for the blood. Like lemon grass and galangal, the rind is also known to have beneficial properties for the digestive system. In folk medicine, the juice of kaffir lime is said to promote gum health and is recommended for use in brushing teeth and gums. It is believed to freshen one's mental outlook and ward off evil spirits.

Thai Green Curry Mussels

1 can coconut milk (14 fl. oz.)
1 tbsp thai green curry paste
1 stalk lemongrass
2-3 Epicentre kaffir lime leaves
1 tbsp asian fish sauce
11/2 lbs mussels (scrubbed and debearded if necessary)

1. 3 tbsps fresh basil leaves (slivered)n a wok or large saucepan over medium-low heat, combine 1/4 cup of the coconut milk and the curry paste. Cut the bottom one-third of the lemongrass stalk into 1-inch pieces. Crush the pieces with the flat side of a chefs knife. Add to the wok along with the lime leaf. Increase the heat to medium and bring the curry mixture to a simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, until fragrant, about 5 minutes.
2. Add the remaining coconut milk, 1/2 cup water and the fish sauce to the curry base and stir. Discard any open mussels that do not close to the touch, then increase the heat to high and add the mussels. When a few start to open, cover the wok and cook for 2 minutes. Uncover and, using a slotted spoon, transfer the opened mussels to individual bowls. Cover the wok again and continue to cook until the remaining mussels open, about 2 minutes more.
3. Transfer the mussels to the bowls, discarding any that have failed to open. Ladle the broth over the mussels, garnish with the basil and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Food Made Fast Series, Seafood, by Jay Harlow (Oxmoor House, 2007).

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/kaffir-lime/



Lavender

English lavender (Lavandula angustifolia) was popular as a stewing herb and cosmetic from around the 12th century. Queen Elizabeth I was said to have been fond of lavender conserve and she also drank lavender tea as a cure for her migraines.

Culinary Uses

English Lavender is the one most commonly used in cooking. It has a sweet flowery flavour with citrus notes. Dried lavender can be very potent, so use sparingly, it can be overwhelming. It is often used in combination with other herbs and spices for robust meat dishes like mutton or game. Fresh lavender flowers make a colourful and edible garnish. Desserts can be decorated with crystallized lavender flowers. Lavender is a member of the mint family and is close to rosemary, sage, and thyme, so lavender can be used in most recipes in place of rosemary. The dried flowers can be put in sugar and kept sealed for a few weeks to create a lavender scented sugar to use in cakes, custards and shortbreads. It is also one of the herbs found in Herbes de Provence and the Moroccan blend, ras el hanout.

Health Benefits of Lavender

A sedative tea can be made with newly opened flower buds that will help with any headaches and faintness. Lavender smelling salts were used to revive people who have fainted. It is also used as a cure for hoarseness and soothing sore joints. A soothing lavender salve is used for inflammations, cuts and burns. A few drops of oil in bathwater to destress or the burning of the essential oil will relax and induce feelings of well being.

Lavender-Sea Salt Shortbread

2 1/2 cups of all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons of cornstarch
1/3 cup of sugar
3/4 cup of unsalted butter, very cold and diced
1 teaspoon of kosher salt
3 tablespoons of honey
1/2 teaspoon of vanilla extract
1 teaspoon of Epicentre lavender
flaky sea salt

1. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees F. Grease an 8 x 8 inch baking pan and line it with a piece of parchment paper, allowing it to hang over opposing sides of the pan.
2. Combine all of the ingredients, save the flaky sea salt, in the bowl of a stand mixer. Blend on low speed, until well incorporated (the dough will be crumbly and won't

come together in a smooth ball). Knead it gently with your hands to combine. Don't worry if it is still crumbly, so long as the ingredients are well-mixed.

3. Press the dough down into the prepared pan, filling in any holes with crumbs that may have fallen off. Flatten the dough evenly in the pan, making sure it fills the pan to the edges. Prick just the top of the dough evenly with a fork.
4. Bake the shortbread for about 30 – 40 minutes, until the top is golden brown and the center is firm.
5. Cool for a few minutes before sprinkling with the flaky sea salt. Then cool for another 30 minutes.
6. Carefully remove the uncut shortbread from the pan by lifting the parchment paper from both sides. Place the sheet onto a large cutting board and cut into squares using a sharp knife.

adapted from Evil Shenanagans

Lavender Icing

YIELD: Makes enough for 2 dozen cupcakes

1/3 cup whole milk
1/2 teaspoon Epicentre lavender
3 cups confectioners' sugar
Violet gel-paste food coloring

1. Bring milk and lavender just to a boil in a small saucepan. Remove from heat, and let steep 10 minutes.
2. Strain, and discard lavender. Whisk in sugar until smooth. Strain again.
3. Add food coloring until desired shade. Use immediately.

Martha Stewart Living, May 2007

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/lavender/

Lemongrass



Lemongrass is a tall tropical grass. The fresh stalks and leaves have a clean lemonlike odour because they contain an essential oil, which is also present in lemon peel.

Spice Description

Lemongrass is a long thick grass with leaves at the top and a solid portion several inches long at the root end. The lower portion is sliced or pounded and used in cooking. As a spice, fresh lemon grass is preferred for its vibrant flavour, but is also sold in dried form. The dried spice is available in several forms: chopped in slices, cut and sifted, powdered, or as an oil can be extracted from the plant.

Bouquet: lemony
Flavour: lemony with hints of ginger
Hotness Scale: 1

Cooking with Lemongrass

If using fresh lemongrass, use only the lower bulbous portion of the stem. It can be pounded and used whole or cut in slices. When using the ground powder (sereh) use one teaspoon as an equal to one stalk of fresh. It is advisable to soak dried sliced lemon grass for two hours before using. When wrapped in a paper bag, lemon grass stems can last 2 to 3 weeks in the refrigerator. The stems can also be frozen for several months. Always wrap and store separately, as lemon grass will impart its flavour to other foods.

Lemongrass features in Indonesian, Malaysian, Sri Lankan and Indian cooking and is widely used in savoury dishes and meat, poultry, seafood and vegetable curries. It harmonizes well with coconut milk, especially with chicken or seafood, and there are countless Thai and Sri Lankan recipes exploiting this combination. The stems are also used in teas or used in pickles and in flavouring marinades.

Health Benefits of Lemongrass

The grass is considered a diuretic, tonic and stimulant. It promotes good digestion, and a preparation of lemongrass with pepper has been used for relief of menstrual troubles and nausea. It induces perspiration, to cool the body and reduce a fever. It is well known a mild insect repellent (citronella) and the essential oil is used in perfumery.

The Best Thai Coconut Soup

1 tbsp vegetable oil
2 tbsps fresh ginger (grated)
1 stalk lemon grass (minced)
2 tsps red curry paste

4 cups chicken broth
3 tbsps fish sauce
1 tbsp light brown sugar
401/2 ozs coconut milk
1/2 lb shiitake mushrooms (fresh, sliced)
1 lb shrimp (- peeled and deveined)
2 tbsps fresh lime juice
salt (taste)
1/4 cup fresh cilantro (chopped)

1. Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. Cook and stir the ginger, lemongrass, and curry paste in the heated oil for 1 minute.
2. Slowly pour the chicken broth over the mixture, stirring continually. Stir in the fish sauce and brown sugar; simmer for 15 minutes.
4. Stir in the coconut milk and mushrooms; cook and stir until the mushrooms are soft, about 5 minutes.
5. Add the shrimp; cook until no longer translucent about 5 minutes. Stir in the lime juice; season with salt; garnish with cilantro.

Adapted from AllRecipes

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/lemongrass/



Mace

Mace is the aril (the bright red, lacy covering) of the nutmeg seed shell. The mace is removed from the shell and its broken parts are known as blades.

The history of mace is closely tied to the history of nutmeg for obvious reasons, though the two items have been treated seperately . Because the yield of mace is much less than nutmeg's it has had greater value. A pile of fruit large enough to make one hundred pounds of nutmeg produces a single pound of mace.

When the Dutch controlled the Moluccas (the Spice Islands), one colonial administator sent orders that the colonists should plant fewer nutmeg trees and more mace trees.

Spice Description

In its natural state, mace is a bright crimson lace up to 35 mm (1-1/2 in) long, encasing the brown nutmeg in irregular, fleshy lobes. As it is dried, it develops its charcteristic aroma but loses its bright red colour. Mace from the West Indies is a yellowish brown colour and with fewer holes than mace from East Indian nutmegs which are more orange when dried.

The mace from either locale can become brittle and horny, though the best quality mace will retain some pliability and release a little oil when squeezed. It is flattened and sometimes roughly broken into 'blades'. It is also sold ground and sometimes still enclosing the nutmeg.

Bouquet: sweet and fragrant, similar to nutmeg, but stronger.

Flavour: warm. sharp and aromatic, more intense and slightly sweeter than nutmeg

Hotness Scale: 1

Cooking with Mace

Dried mace pieces are not easy to crush. Ready-ground mace is easier to use, but will deteriorate much more quickly. Whole mace pieces can be steeped in liquid and then the liquid can be used, or the mace pieces can be removed after cooking. One 'blade' is strong enough to flavour a meal of four to six portions.

Mace and nutmeg are very similar, though mace is somewhat more powerful. Mace is a lighter colour and can be used in light-coloured dishes where the darker flecks of nutmeg would be undesirable. A small amount will enchance many recipes, adding fragrance without imposing too much flavour.

Mace works especially well with milk dishes like custards and cream sauces. It contributes to flavouring light-coloured cakes and pastries, especially donuts. It can enhance clear and creamed soups and casseroles, chicken pies and sauces. Adding some to mashed potatoes or sweet potatoes creates a more interesting side dish.

Some beverages improve with a little mace, especially chocolate drinks and tropical punches. Mashed potato and other root vegetables can be given an exotic kick by adding nutmeg or mace and spinach in particular is often seasoned with nutmeg, especially in Italian cooking. With regards to savoury meat dishes meat, nutmeg is often used as a substitute for black pepper, when a stronger and richer flavour is desired. You can add ground mace to meat marinades, sausage mixtures, curries and stews and nutmeg goes particularly well with lamb, chicken and veal.

Heath Benefits of Mace

Nutmeg and mace are very similar in culinary and medicinal properties. Both spices are efficient in treating digestive and stomach problems. Below are some of the benefits obtained from small quantities of nutmeg spice or nutmeg oil.

Mace aids digestion and also stimulates the appetite.

It can help relieve tiredness and fatigue and is a good tonic.

It can help clear up digestive tract infections.

When applied externally, nutmeg oil can ease rheumatic pains and clear up eczema.

It can relive intestinal gas and flatulence.

It can reduce vomiting, nausea and general stomach uneasiness.

Mace Cookies

4 cups all-purpose flour
2 tsps baking powder
1/4 tsp mace (ground)
3/4 cup shortening
2 cups white sugar
2 eggs
1/4 cup milk
11/2 tsps vanilla extract
1 tsp lemon zest

1. Combine flour, baking powder and mace. Set aside. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).
2. In large bowl, cream shortening and sugar together. Beat in eggs, then beat in the milk and vanilla extract. Beat in lemon zest. Gradually blend in dry ingredients. Cover and chill for at least four hours.
3. Roll out dough on floured surface to 1/8 inch thickness. Use a 2 inch round cookie cutter and cut into rounds. Place 1 inch apart on prepared cookie sheets.
4. Bake for 10-12 minutes or until lightly colored. Cool on cookie racks.

Adapted from a recipe by AllRecipes

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/mace/



Mint

Mint has been used for many centuries. The name comes from the Greek legend of the nymph Minthe, who attracted the attention of Hades. Hades' wife, the jealous Persephone, attacked Minthe and was in the process of trampling her to death when Hades turned her into the herb (and was ever sacred to him).

A symbol of hospitality and wisdom, "the very smell of it reanimates the spirit", Pliny tells us. Ancient Hebrews scattered mint on their synagogue floors so that each footstep would raise its fragrance. Ancient Greeks and Romans rubbed tables with mint before their guests arrive. The Romans brought it and mint sauce to Britain. The pilgrims brought it to the United States aboard the Mayflower. The Japanese have distilled peppermint oil for several centuries and the oil is further treated to produce menthol.

Bouquet: Spearmint and peppermint: aromatic and fresh Pennyroyal: aromatic, pungent and acrid

Flavour: Spearmint is generally a sweet flavour imparting a cool sensation to the mouth. Peppermint has a stronger menthol taste. Pennyroyal is strong with a medicinal flavour.

Hotness Scale: 0-2

Culinary Uses

For most culinary purposes spearmint is the preferred variety. Mint combines well with many vegetables such as new potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and peas. A few chopped leaves give refreshment to green salads and salad dressings. Pennyroyal is used to season haggis and black puddings. Peppermint is more commonly used in desserts, adding fresh flavour to fruits, ices and sherberts. Spearmint is popular in the Balkans and Middle East, where it is used both fresh and dried with grilled meats, stuffed vegetables and rice and is an essential ingredient of dolmas, stuffed vine leaves. Dried mint is sprinkled over hummus and other pulse and grain dishes. Yogurt dressings, dips and soups often include mint. In India fresh mint chutney is served with birianis. American mint julep is a southern classic and a glass of English Pimms #1 must always be served with a sprig of mint. Mint tea is enjoyed copiously by Moslem Arabs. Peppermint is used to flavour toothpaste, chewing gum and liqueurs such as creme de menthe.

Health Benefits of Mint

It is carminative, stimulative, stomachic, diaphoretic and antispasmodic. Peppermint has the highest concentrations of menthol, while preparations of spearmint are often given to children. It is a general pick-me-up, good for colds, flu and fevers. Herbalists tell us it helps digestion, rheumatism, hiccups, stings, ear aches, flatulence and for throat and sinus ailments. There are also claims that a glass of creme de menthe helps with motion sickness.

Watermelon Salad with Feta & Mint

6 cups watermelon (cubes, from about 1/4 of a large watermelon)

1 tbsp rice vinegar

3 ozs feta cheese (drained and crumbled)

1 mint leaves (loosely packed cup)

ground black pepper

Flaky sea salt

1. Pour off any juice that has gathered around the watermelon. Toss gently with the rice vinegar. Toss with the feta cheese crumbles, just until the watermelon begins to look lightly coated.

2. Chop the mint leaves very, very finely, into tiny ribbons. Toss with the watermelon and spread in a serving bowl. Garnish generously with black pepper. Taste. If desired, add a sprinkle of flaky sea salt. Serve immediately.

Adapted from a recipe by The Kitchn

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/mint



Nigella

Nigella has been used since antiquity by Asian herbalists and pharmacists and was used for culinary purposes by the Romans. The seeds are known to repel certain insects and can be used like moth balls. The name nigella derives from the Latin nigellus, or niger, meaning black.

Nigella seeds (nigella sativa) have many confusing synonyms, but it bears no relation to any of them. Worse still, nigella seeds look a lot like black sesame seeds and are often used interchangeably. It's too bad, because the nigella seed gives off a musty, smoky flavor that none of the others have.

Nigella seeds are small, matte-black grains with a rough surface and an oily white interior. They are roughly triangulate, 1 1/2 – 3 mm (1/16 to 1/8 in) long. They are similar to onion seeds.

Bouquet: The seeds have little bouquet, though when they are rubbed they give off an aroma reminiscent of oregano.

Flavour: Slightly bitter and peppery with a crunchy texture.

Hotness Scale: 3 Preparation and Storage The seeds may be used whole or ground and are usually fried or roasted before use The are easily crushed in a mortar and pestle.

Cooking with Nigella

Nigella is used in India and the Middle East as a spice and condiment and occasionally in Europe as both a pepper substitute and a spice. It is widely used in Indian cuisines, particularly in mildly braised lamb dishes such as korma. It is also added to vegetable and dhal dishes as well as in chutneys. The seeds are sprinkled on to naan bread before baking. Nigella is an ingredient of some garam masalas and is one of the five spices in panch phoran. In the Middle East nigella is added to bread dough.

Health Benefits of Nigella

Nigella is used in Indian medicine as a carminative and stimulant and is used against indigestion and bowel complaints. In India it is used to induce post-natal uterine contraction and promote lactation. The seed yields a volatile oil containing melanthin, nigilline, damascene and tannin. Melanthin is toxic in large dosages and Niugelline is paralytic, so this spice must be used in moderation.

Naan

This East Indian flat bread is used as a utensil alongside traditional curries. Made in a cylindrical clay tandoor oven, a flat circle of dough is slapped onto the side of the oven, giving it the tradional snowshoe shape.

1 pkg. active dry yeast

1 cup warm water

1 TB. sugar
1/4 cup plain yogurt
1 TB. Epicentre nigella
1 tsp. kosher salt
3 or 4 cups bread flour
2 to 4 TB. ghee

1. In a large bowl, combine yeast and warm water, and stir to dissolve. Add sugar, yogurt, nigella, and salt, and stir to combine. Add flour slowly, and stir until a firm dough forms.
2. Turn out dough onto a lightly floured surface, and knead for 8 to 10 minutes or until dough is smooth and elastic, adding more flour as needed. Cover dough with a warm, damp towel, and let rise until double in volume.
3. Divide dough into 8 portions and roll into balls. Pat balls flat into discs and elongate into ovals about 1/2 inch thick.
4. Preheat an iron skillet or griddle to high. Oil lightly with ghee, add dough, and cook for 2 to 4 minutes or until golden brown and puffy. Brush uncooked side with ghee, flip, and brown. Serve warm.

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/nigella/#sthash.zhmQzpGx.dpuf



Nutmeg

The nutmeg tree is a large evergreen native to the Moluccas (the Spice Islands) and is now cultivated in the West Indies. It produces two spices — mace and nutmeg.

Nutmeg has long been lauded as possessing or imparting magical powers. A sixteenth century monk is on record as advising young men to carry vials of nutmeg oil and at the appropriate time, to anoint their genitals for virility that would see them through several days. Tucking a nutmeg into the left armpit before attending a social event was believed to attract admirers. Nutmegs were often used as amulets to protect against a wide variety of dangers and evils; from boils to rheumatism to broken bones and other misfortunes. In the Middle Ages carved wooden imitations were even sold in the streets. People carried nutmegs everywhere and many wore little graters made of silver, ivory or wood, often with a compartment for the nuts.

Nutmeg is not a nut and does not pose a risk to people with nut allegies. Allergy to nutmeg does occur, but occurs less frequently and usually less severely than nut allergies.

The nutmeg seed is encased in a mottled yellow, edible fruit, the approximate size and shape of a small peach. The fruit splits in half to reveal a net-like, bright red covering over

the seed. This is the aril which is collected, dried and sold as mace. Under the aril is a dark shiny nut-like pit, and inside that is the oval shaped seed which is the nutmeg. Nutmegs are usually sold without the mace or hard shell.

Whole nutmeg may be coated with lime to protect against insects and fungus, though this practice is giving way to other forms of fumigation.

Bouquet: sweet, aromatic and nutty
Flavour: Nutty, warm and slightly sweet
Hotness Scale: 1

Cooking with Nutmeg

Whole nuts are preferable to ground nutmeg, as flavour deteriorates quickly. Whole nuts will keep indefinitely and can be grated as required with a nutmeg grater. Nutmeg is poisonous and should be used in moderation, a pinch or two is safe. Store both ground and whole nutmeg away from sunlight in airtight containers.

Nutmeg is usually associated with sweet, spicy dishes — pies, puddings, custards, cookies and spice cakes. It combines well with many cheeses, and is included in soufflés and cheese sauces. In soups it works with tomatoes, slit pea, chicken or black beans. It complements egg dishes and vegetables like cabbage, spinach, broccoli, beans onions and eggplant. It flavours Italian mortadella sausages, Scottish haggis and Middle Eastern lamb dishes. It is often included as part of the Moroccan spice blend ras el hanout. It is indispensable to eggnog and numerous mulled wines and punches.

Health Benefits of Nutmeg

Used in small dosages nutmeg can reduce flatulence, aid digestion, improve the appetite and treat diarrhea, vomiting and nausea. Nutmeg's flavour and fragrance come from oil of myristica, containing myristicin, a poisonous narcotic. Myristicin can cause hallucinations, vomiting, epileptic symptoms and large dosages can cause death. These effects will not be induced, however, even with generous culinary usage.

Nutmeg Maple Butter Cookies

1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
1/2 cup (118 ml) maple syrup (Grade B is ideal here, but the original recipe suggested that Grade A with a few drops of maple extract would also work)
1 large egg yolk
3 cups (375 grams) all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg or 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 1/4 teaspoon flaky salt or 1 teaspoon table salt

1. Using an electric mixer, beat butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. With mixer running, add yolk and slowly drizzle in maple syrup. In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, nutmeg and salt. Add to butter mixture and mix until just combined. The dough

will be in loose clumps. Gather them together into a tight packet with a large piece of plastic wrap and chill dough for at least two hours (and up to four days) until firm.

2. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and line a few baking sheets with parchment paper. I like to roll out a quarter to half the dough at a time, leaving the rest in the fridge. On a floured counter, roll dough to 1/8-inch thickness and cut into desired shapes.

3. Arrange cookies on baking sheets and bake for 8 to 11 minutes each, or until lightly golden at the edges. Transfer to racks to cool. Cookies keep in airtight containers for a week, or in the freezer until their dance number is up.

Adapted from a recipe in Gourmet February 1995

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/nutmeg



Paprika

Like all capsicums, the paprika varieties are native to South America. Originally a tropical plant, it can now grow in cooler climates. In Europe Hungary and Spain are the two main centres for growing paprika peppers, though these varieties have evolved into much milder forms than their tropical ancestors.

Hungarian paprika is known as stronger and richer than Spanish paprika, which is quite mild, though through controlled breeding they are becoming more alike. To maintain the stronger taste that consumers expect, some spice companies add cayenne to heat up Hungarian paprika. It is also produced and used in Turkey, Yugoslavia and the United States.

The Spanish grades of pimentón are dolce (sweet), agridulce (semi sweet) and picante (hot). It is also graded for quality, depending on the proportion of flesh to seeds and pith. In Hungary there as six classes ranging from Kulonleges (exquisite delicate) to Eros (hot and pungent).

Paprika is a fine powder ground from certain varieties of Capsicum annuum which vary in size and shape. They may be small and round (Spain and Morocco) or pointed and cone shaped (Hungary and California). They are larger and milder than chilli peppers. Paprika is produces from peppers ripened to redness, sometimes called 'pimento', the same as used to stuff olives. The powder can vary in colour from bright red to rusty brown.

Bouquet: slightly warm and sweet

Flavour: ranges from sweet and mild to pungent and fiery.

Hotness Scale: 2-7

Cooking with Paprika

Paprika is intimately associated with Hungarian cuisine especially paprikash and goulash.

Many spiced sausages incorporate it, including the Spanish chorizos. Paprika is often used as a garnish, spinkled on eggs, hors d'ouvres and salads for colour. It spices and colours cheeses and cheese spreads, and is used in marinades and smoked foods.

It can be incorporated in the flour dusting for chicken and other meats. Many Spanish, Portuguese and Turkish recipes use paprika for soups, stews, casseroles and vegetables. In India paprika is sometimes used in tandoori chicken, to give the characteristic red colour. Paprika is an emulsifier, temporarily bonding with oil and vinegar to make a smooth mixture for a salad dressing.

Health Benefits of Paprika

Fresh red peppers have more than seven times as much vitamin C as oranges, but the very high heat of modern drying destroys much of the vitamin C in paprika. It is however, an excellent source of betacarotene, that the body converts to vitamin A.

Chicken Paprikash (Paprika Chicken)

14 1/2 ozs chicken broth (simmered to reduce to 3/4 cup, or start with 1 1/2 cups homemade chicken stock)
1 can (14.5 oz.) diced tomatoes (drained until fairly dry)
1 onion (large, chopped in fairly big pieces)
12 ozs roasted red peppers, drained (well and cut into pieces about 1 - 2 inches square)
2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (large, pounded to an even thickness and cut into cubes about 1 1/4 inches)
1 tsp Epicentre sweet smoked paprika
salt
ground black pepper
2 tsps olive oil (or slightly more if you don't use a non-stick pan)
1 tsp Epicentre hot smoked paprika
1/2 tsp caraway seed (ground, optional)
3/4 cup reduced fat sour cream (more or less to taste)

1. Put the chicken stock or broth into a small pan and simmer over medium heat until it's reduced to 3/4 cup. Drain the canned tomatoes into a colander placed into the sink (you can catch the juice and freeze for another use if you'd like.) Drain the roasted red peppers into another colander.
2. Cut onions into fairly large pieces, at least an inch square. Cut drained red peppers into pieces about 1 1/2 inches square.
3. Trim the chicken breasts until all the visible fat is gone. (I save the scraps to make homemade chicken stock). Pound chicken with a meat mallet or something heavy until they're an even thickness, about an inch thick. Cut chicken into large cubes (about 1 1/4 inches square). Season the chicken cubes with 1 tsp. sweet paprika plus salt and fresh-ground black pepper to taste.

4. Heat 2 tsp. olive oil in a large non-stick frying pan and cook chicken over medium-high heat until the pieces are nicely browned on all sides and barely cooked through, about 5-7 minutes. Remove chicken to a plate. Add the other tsp. of olive oil and the onions and cook until unions are browned, about 4 minutes. Add the 1 T sweet paprika, the hot paprika, and the ground caraway seed (if using) and cook about 1 minute more.
5. Add the tomatoes and peppers and cook about 2 minutes. Add the reduced chicken stock and cook 2-3 minutes (until the stock is bubbling hot.) Then add the browned chicken cubes and any juice that's accumulated on the plate), turn heat to LOW, and simmer just until the chicken is heated through, about 2-3 minutes.
6. Turn off the heat and let the mixture sit for a minute or two. (This is VERY IMPORTANT so it's not so hot that the sour cream will curdle. The mixture should have completely stopped simmering when you add the sour cream.) Add the sour cream and stir gently to combine.
7. Serve hot. This is great with rice or noodles to soak up the juice, but I also like it just served in a bowl like a stew. I wouldn't recommend freezing for this recipe, but it will keep for a few days in the fridge and can be reheated in the microwave or in a pan on the stove (with low heat, don't let it boil.)

Adapted from a recipe from Kalyn's Kitchen

Smoked Paprika

The colour is a striking deep red that spreads through any dish to which it is added. It has an intoxicating smoky aroma from the slow oak smoking, and a silky texture from the repeated grinding between stones. And because three different peppers are grown and smoked, there are three different delicious flavours – sweet, bittersweet and hot.

The smoked paprika from La Vera was the world's first pepper spice to be given a Denominación de Origen status in 1993. We've tried many smoked paprikas, many are excellent but we recommend the Spanish La Chinata brand, They have a 3-pack of sweet, bittersweet and hot. You can buy smoked paprika here. Use it wherever regular paprika is called for or where you want that extra depth of flavour the smoking provides. Some more suggestions:

Put some thick Greek yoghurt in a shallow dish, drizzle it liberally with extra virgin olive oil and sprinkle well with bittersweet smoked paprika. Use as a dip with drinks.

Quickly fry 2 chopped cloves of garlic, 1 teaspoon of sweet smoked paprika and a bay leaf quickly in a little extra virgin olive oil. Add a splash of wine vinegar and some chopped red onion and toss it with boiled Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower, broccolini or broccoflower.

Add a little sweet smoked paprika to a vinaigrette and toss it through a salad.

Rub a chicken all over, inside and out, with hot smoked paprika for a spicy roast chicken.

Slowly fry waxy potatoes, sliced onions and chopped garlic in olive oil and a little sweet smoked paprika, season well and serve with roast lamb.

Rub skinned boned firm white fish fillets with a mixture of 2 tablespoons of sweet smoked paprika, 1/2 teaspoon salt and the juice of a lemon, dust with flour and fry in hot olive oil until golden.

Sautéed Kale with Smoked Paprika

lb kale (fresh, carefully rinsed stems and center ribs cut away and discarded leaves coarsely chopped)
2 tbsps olive oil
1 onions (chopped about 1 cup)
1/2 tsp Epicentre smoked paprika (hot or sweet)
1 pinch Epicentre Aleppo pepper or crushed red pepper
salt

1. Bring a large pot (4 qts) of water to a boil. Add a Tablespoon of salt to the water. Add the chopped kale. Cook until wilted, about 5 minutes. Drain and set aside.
2. Heat olive oil in a large sauté pan on medium heat. Add the chopped onion and sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir in the smoked paprika and crushed red pepper. Add the kale and sauté for several more minutes. Sprinkle on more salt and smoked paprika to taste.

Serves 4.

Recipe from Simply Recipes

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/paprika/

Pepper

A member of the botanical family *piperaceae* (pepper). The pepper vine (piper nigrum) grows in tropical regions, close to the equator. In its natural jungle habitat, it climbs up trees 20 feet high. It has thick, broad, dark green leaves and small white flowers that grow in clumps. The flowers mature into berries that ripen from green to orange to red.

To produce black pepper, berries are harvested green and dried in the sun until wrinkled and black. White pepper is made from ripe berries that have had the skin



removed before drying. Unripe green peppercorns are also sold in brine, still green and soft.

Pepper is one of the most popular spices in history. It was used in the embalming rituals of ancient Egypt, paid as taxes in ancient Rome, and the third-century cookbook Apicius uses pepper in nearly every entry. Let's not forget Vasco de Gama and his Portuguese mariners, who were inspired by pepper to find a route to India.

Pepper comes from several species of a vinous plant, the spice being the fruit, called peppercorns. Black pepper is the dried, unripe berry. The corns are wrinkled and spherical, about 5 mm (1/8 in) in diameter. Malabar and Tellicherry pepper are both considered top quality due to size and maturity, with only 10% of the largest corns being graded as Tellicherry.

White pepper starts out the same as the black, but are allowed to ripen more fully on the vine. The outer shell is then removed by soaking the berries in water until the shell falls off, or are held under flowing spring water, yielding a whiter, cleaner pepper.

Green peppercorns are from the same fruit as black and white peppercorns, but are harvested before they mature. Instead of being dried in the sun, they are quickly dehydrated so that they retain their bright green colour and mildly spicy flavour.

Green peppercorns are also packed fresh in brine to preserve them without drying. The Moulin family of France hand-selects and sorts Madagascar-grown green peppercorns, preserves them in saltwater brine, and then packs them in a distinctive green, black and white can. These soft green peppercorns are common in French cooking, and are most famously used in steak au poivre.Dehydrated green peppercorns are easy substituted for peppercorns in brine, or pickled peppercorns, by re-hydrating them in liquid one hour before use. Warm water works well, but wine, broth, or any other liquid can just as easily be used.

Pink pepper, which is not a vinous pepper, comes from the French island of Reunion. Pink peppercorns have a brittle, papery pink skin enclosing a hard, irregular seed, much smaller than the whole fruit.

Cooking with Pepper

Pepper is best ground directly on to food. With hot food it is best to add it well towards the end of the cooking process, to preserve its aroma. White pepper is used in white sauces rather than black, which would give the sauce a speckled appearance. Green peppercorns can be mashed with garlic, cinnamon or to make a spiced butter or with cream to make a fresh and attractive sauce for fish. Pink peppercorns are called for in a variety of dishes, from poultry to vegetables and fish.

Black Pepper and Parmesan Twist

1 cup whole wheat flour

1 cup white flour

1 tsp baking powder

1 tsp salt
1/2 cup parmesan cheese
2 tbsps black pepper
4 tbsps olive oil
3/4 cup water
1 cup feta
1/3 cup green onion
1 cup sour cream
1/2 tbsp garlic powder
1/2 tbsp oregano
salt
pepper

1. Pre-heat oven to 400
2. Combine all the dry ingredients in a food processor (including cheese and pepper.) Pulse a few times to combine. Add in 3 tablespoons of the olive oil and pulse until the mix looks like coarse meal.
3. Begin with adding ½ cup of the water and let the processor run. If the dough does not start to come together, start adding water tablespoon by tablespoon (pulsing after each time) until the dough starts to come together.
4. Scrap dough out onto a floured surface and roll out to a ¼" thick rectangle. Brush with remaining olive oil and sprinkle with extra cheese and black pepper. Cut strips ½" wide (can go more or less) and twist. Place on a baking sheet and bake for 14-15 minutes until the twist are golden. If you decide to roll your dough thinner or thicker (or cut thinner or thicker) be prepared to adjust your baking time. I always start with 1o minutes and go from there.

Recipe from Naturally Ella

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/pepper

Poppy Seed



Blue Poppy seeds are considered 'European' poppy seeds because they are the kind seen most often on Western breads, bagels and in confectionery. White poppy seeds are often referred to as 'Indian', 'Middle Eastern' or 'Asian' since they are featured in these cuisines. There is actually very little difference in flavour between the two, so usage is more a question of aesthetics or availability.

Spice Description

Poppy seeds are like tiny hard grains. The Western type is slate blue; the Indian type, off-white. Both are kidney-shaped. The blue seeds average 1mm (.O4in) in length, while the white seeds are somewhat smaller. They are similar in flavour and texture and their uses are interchangeable. The seeds mature in a capsule left after the flower fades. They are widely available in a dried form.

Bouquet: A mild sweetish aroma which is brought out by roasting or baking.

Flavour: Mild until heated, then it becomes nutty, with sweet-spicy under-tones.

Hotness Scale: 0

Culinary Uses

In the West, the blue poppy seeds are used principally in confectionery and in baking. Like several other spicy seeds, they are sprinkled on breads and buns and used in a variety of Western cakes and pastries, for example in poppy cakes, strudels and Danish pastries. Poppy seed complements honey spread an bread, giving a nice contrast of texture.

Fried in butter, poppy seed can be added to noodles or pasta. It flavours vegetables and their accompanying sauces, especially asparagus and root vegetables. Sprinkled into coleslaw, the seeds give a contrast of both colour and texture. They are used to top creamed potatoes and au gratin dishes, and sometimes appear in fish dishes.

In Middle Eastern and Jewish cookery, poppy seeds go on breads and in cakes and candies and are often seen studding pretzels. In the East the white poppy seed is generally used. Chappatis (Indian whole-wheat griddle breads) may contain it, and certain curries and varieties of mixed spice contain a small proportion of poppy. Its function in curry is partially to thicken the liquid and add texture. The whole seeds are used in chutneys.

Health Benefits of Poppy Seeds

Western poppy syrup is an anodyne and expectorant. Eastern poppy is an anodyne and narcotic. Cough mixtures and syrups are also made from this variety, which is further used as a poultice with chamomile. An infusion of seeds is said to help ear and tooth ache. The seeds have appetising qualities. The use and dangers of poppy plant derivatives, such as morphine, heroin and codeine, are well known. In the Middle Ages an anaesthetic was produced called 'the soporific sponge', an infusion made of poppy, mandrake, hemlock and ivy that was poured over a sponge and held under the patient's nostrils.

Poppy Seed Roll

600 grams flour
125 grams butter
120 mls sour cream
50 mls milk
70 mls water
100 grams sugar
1 tbsp vanilla sugar
4 egg yolks
1 tbsp oil
2 tsps vanilla extract
1 orange
21/4 tsps active dry yeast
300 grams poppy seed
3/4 cup milk
3 tbsps sugar
1 vanilla sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract

1. Heat the milk until it's warm, not hot. In a medium size bowl, add a little bit of the milk and add the yeast, stir it well and let it rest until it bubbles up.
2. Mix all of the dough ingredients together, including the yeast mixture. You can either do this in your mixer with a dough attachment,and let it mix for about 10 to 15 minutes, or you knead it by hand for about 30 minutes. This is the secret to this roll, it needs to be kneaded for a long time.
3. Place the dough in an oiled bowl and cover it with a damp towel and let it double in size, for at least an hour.
4. In the meantime, we can complete the filling mixture. In a sauce pan, combine all the filling ingredients, excluding the vanilla extract, and let cook for about 20 minutes. At the end you can add the vanilla extract and mix well.Let cool.
5. Once the dough has doubled in size, divide the dough in 2 pieces. Roll out each piece, it should be at least 12 inches or more in diameter. Take half of the poppy seed mixture and spread it on each piece. Roll each piece and place it in a bread pan, or place both of them on a cookie sheet. As you can see from the pictures, I twisted mine and put them in a circle in the pan. The pan should be buttered.
6. Let the rolls rise again until doubled, for another 45 minutes.
7. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Brush the rolls with egg wash, and you may sprinkle some sugar if desired. Bake the rolls for about an hour or until golden brown.

Recipe adapted from Jo Cooks

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/poppy-seed/



Quatre Épice

"Four-spices" usually includes four of five spices and are commonly used to season charcuterie such as sausages and terrines. There are actually two approaches to quatre epice, the most well known is a savory version and there is also a sweet version used in rich cakes and puddings. Savory quatre épices goes well with rich meats such as game and adds extra flavour with peppery heat to rich, dark beef casseroles cooked in red wine. For each pound of meat use one teaspoon of savory quatre épices, or more according to taste.

Quatre Épice Sweet Potato Soup

1 onion (large, diced)
3 garlic cloves (peeled & crushed)
31/2 tbsps unsalted butter (sweet)
2 lbs sweet potatoes (or 2 lbs yams, peeled & cut into 1 inch cubes)
32 ozs vegetable broth
2 cinnamon sticks
3 Epicentre star anise
2 sprigs fresh rosemary
4 tsps quatre epices
1 tsp sea salt
1/2 tsp cinnamon
3/4 cup heavy cream
2 ozs chopped pecans

1. Remove the rosemary needles from the sprigs. Mince the needles & pecans in a food processor until very fine & reserve for later.
2. Melt the butter in a large pot then fry garlic and onions over medium heat until the onions are soft.
3. Add the yams, cinnamon sticks, Epicentre star anise, rosemary branches and the stock. Bring to a boil then reduce heat & simmer covered for 20 minutes or until the yams are soft.
4. Remove the pot from the heat and discard the cinnamon sticks, Epicentre star anise, & rosemary sprigs.
5. In a food processor, purée the soup in batches until smooth. Return the puréed soup to the pot, add the remaining spices and cream, and heat just to the boiling point.
6. Reduce the heat to low & simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from heat then taste and adjust the seasonings, if necessary. If the soup is too thick, add a bit of cream or stock.
7. To serve, garnish with the reserved rosemary and pecans.

Recipe from food.com



Ras el Hanout (Moroccan Blend)

Literally "top of the shop," ras el hanout is a Moroccan spice blend that can contain more than 30 ingredients. For the Moroccan souks (spice merchants) it is a point of honour to have the most sought after version of this blend. There are stories of these spice merchants creating custom blends of ras el hanout for special clients with ingredients that might include hashish and even Spanish fly.

Ras el hanout is somewhat curry-like with a spicy kick, a floral fragrance and subtle nuances within an overall robust flavor. It is extremely versatile, adding a golden colour and an aromatic and enticing flavor to chicken and vegetable tagines. Add a half teaspoon to a cup of rice or cous cous while cooking to transend the ordinary. Our favourite is to use ras el hanout as a spice rub on lamb chops grilled on the barbeque.

Chard with Ras el Hanout and Preserved Lemon

4 bunches rainbow chard, each 10 oz., preferably with red and gold stalks
Kosher salt, to taste
1/4 cup grapeseed or canola oil
1/2 cup diced yellow onion (1/8-inch dice)
1 Tbs. Epicentre Moroccan Blend (ras el hanout)
1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice, preferably Meyer lemon
1/4 cup diced preserved lemon rind
1 1/2 tsp. Epicentre Aleppo pepper or red pepper flakes

1. Extra-virgin olive oil for drizzling (optional)
2. Cut the stalks off the chard and set the leaves aside. Trim off the bottoms, narrow tops and outer edges of the stalks. Cut enough of the stalks into 3-by-1/8-inch matchsticks to yield 1 1/2 cups. Cut enough of the remaining stalks into 1/16-inch dice to yield 1 cup.
3. Bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a boil over high heat. Fill a large bowl with ice water. Working in batches, blanch the chard leaves until tender, 2 to 2 1/2 minutes. Transfer to the ice water and let cool. Remove the leaves from the water, squeeze well to remove the excess liquid and coarsely chop them.
4. In a large sauté pan over medium heat, warm the grapeseed oil. Add the onion and a pinch of salt and cook, stirring often, until the onion begins to soften, about 5 minutes. Add the chard matchsticks, ras el hanout and a pinch of salt and cook until the matchsticks begin to soften, 4 to 5 minutes. Stir in the diced stalks and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in the leaves and cook for 1 minute.
5. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the lemon juice, preserved lemon and Aleppo pepper. Drizzle with olive oil. Serves 6.

Adapted from Mourad: New Moroccan, by Mourad Lahlou (Artisan, 2011).

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/ras-el-hanout/



Saffron

Coming from the dried stigmas of the saffron crocus, it takes 75,000 blossoms or 225,000 hand-picked stigmas to make a single pound which explains why it is the world's most expensive spice.

Spice Description

Saffron is the three stigmas of the saffron crocus. They are delicate and thread-like, each measuring 2.5 – 4 cm (1 -1.5 in). Its colour is a bright orange-red, and in high quality saffron this is uniform. Saffron threads bearing white streaks or light patches is inferior and when light specks appear in its powdered form it suggests adulteration.

Bouquet: Strongly perfumed, with an aroma of honey

Flavour: A pungent bitter-honey taste

Hotness Scale: 0

Because of its expense, intense flavour, and strong dying properties, very little saffron is required for culinary purposes and the key is to distribute it evenly throughout the dish being prepared. It can be crushed to a fine powder in a mortar and pestle. It is easier however, to steep the saffron in hot water— a pinch to a cup will create the desired flavour and colour. Good saffron should expand on contact with the water and a cup should be sufficient for 0.5 kg (1 lb) of rice. Powdered saffron is added directly to the required ingredients of a dish, though we recommend against buying saffron powdered, as it is so frequently adulterated. Store in a cool dry place, out of the light.

Cooking with Saffron

Saffron appears in Moorish, Mediterranean and Asian cuisines. Its most common function is to colour rice yellow, as in festive Indian pilaus and risotto Milanese, where its delicate flavour make it the most famous of Italian rice dishes. It combines well with fish and seafood, infamous as a key ingredient of Spanish paella as well as bouillabaisse. In England, saffron is probably best known for its use in Cornish saffron buns where it is paired with dried fruit in a yeast cake.

Health Benefits of Saffron

Saffron contains plant-derived compounds known to have anti-oxidant, disease-preventing and health-promoting properties. Saffron threads have essential volatile oils but the most important is safranal, which gives saffron its distinct hay-like flavor. Other saffron oils include: cineole, phenethenol, pinene, borneol, geraniol, limonene, p-cymene, linalool, terpinen-4-oil. The active components have many therapeutic applications in many traditional medicines as antiseptic, antidepressant, anti-oxidant, digestive, anti-convulsant.

Saffron is a good source of minerals like copper, potassium, calcium, manganese, iron, selenium, zinc and magnesium. Potassium is an important component of cell and body fluids that helps control heart rate and blood pressure. Manganese and copper are used by

the body as co-factors for the antioxidant enzyme, superoxide dismutase. Iron is essential for red blood cell production.

Saffron Rice

2 pinches saffron threads (good quality, spice)
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 minced onion (yellow onion minced about 12 cup)
2 cups basmati rice (white)
33/4 cups chicken stock (substitute water + extra pinch of salt)
1 tsp salt

1. Take one pinch of saffron threads and put them in a spice mortar. Grind the spice with a pestle to a powdery consistency.
2. Add a second pinch of saffron threads to the mortar. Do not crush these threads.
3. Pour 1/4 cup of hot water into the mortar. Let the saffron soak for 5 minutes. This will open up the flavor of the spice. Meanwhile, sort your basmati rice and rinse in a colander. Drain.
4. In a large heavy pot, heat extra virgin olive oil over medium. Add the minced onion to the pot and saute for about 10 minutes, till the onion begins to caramelize. Add rice to the pot and saute for one minute longer, mixing the rice together with the cooked onion.
5. Pour the yellow saffron liquid evenly across the top of the rice, making sure to scrape any saffron that clings to the mortar into the pot. Add broth (or water and extra pinch of salt) to the pot. Bring to a boil. Cover the pot and reduce heat to low. Let the rice cook for 20 minutes, or until all the stock is absorbed and the rice is tender.
6. Fluff the rice with a fork before serving.

Recipe adapted from The Shiksa in the Kitchen

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/saffron/



Sesame

Sesame is an ancient spice, one of the first recorded plants used for its seeds. It has been used for thousands of years and is still an oil seed of worldwide significance. Early Assyrians believed their gods drank sesame wine as a prelude to creating the world. A drawing on an Egyptian tomb of 4,000 years ago depicts a baker adding sesame seeds to dough. Around the same time, the Chinese were burning sesame oil to make a soot for ink. Ancient Greek soldiers carried sesame seeds as energy boosting emergency rations and the Romans made a kind of hummus from sesame and cumin.

Sesame has been considered a symbol of good luck and signifies immortality to Brahmins. Sesame oil is a non-drying oil, highly stable rarely turning rancid in hot climates. It is very

rich in protein, a polyunsaturated fat used in margarine production and cooking oils. Non-culinary uses include its use as an ingredient in soap, cosmetics, lubricants and medicines. In southern India it is used to anoint the body and hair.

The "Open Sesame" of Arabian Nights fame, probably derives from the sound the ripe seeds make when they burst from their pods, a popping noise that sounds like a lock spring opening.

Bouquet: Nutty and earthy
Flavour: Nutty
Hotness Scale: 0

Cooking with Sesame Seed

The simplest and now commonest use of sesame is as whole seeds sprinkled over cakes and breads, like poppy seeds. In Syria and Lebanon it is mixed with sumac and thyme to make the condiment zatar. Sesame is a key ingredient in halva, the Middle Eastern confection, where the seeds are ground and pressed into blocks with various sweet or nutty ingredients. Sesame in its ground form, tahini, is widely used throughout the Middle East and Mediterranean. It is a flavouring for hummus, a sauce for kebabs and is often mixed with lemon and garlic to make a bread dip — a popular Arab appetizer or mezze. In Mexico, its oil is called ajonjoli which is frequently used for cooking.

Black sesame appears frequently in Chinese, Japanese and Korean dishes where meat or fish is rolled in the seeds before cooking for a crunchy coating. Black sesame is an ingredient of gomassio, the Japanese tabletop condiment, and other colourful rice and noodle dishes.

Sesame Seed Health Benefits

Sesame seeds are high in energy but contain many health benefiting nutrients, minerals, antioxidants and vitamins that are essential for wellness. The seeds are especially rich in mono-unsaturated fatty acid oleic acid, which comprise up to 50% fatty acids in them. Oleic acid helps to lower LDL or "bad cholesterol" and increase HDL or "good cholesterol" in the blood. Research suggests that Mediterranean diet which is rich in mono-unsaturated fats help to prevent coronary artery disease and stroke.

Roasted Radishes with Soy Sauce and Toasted Sesame Seed

20 radishes (medium, trimmed and cut into fourths, use all red, or a mixture of red and white)
1 1/2 tbsps peanut oil (roasted)
1 1/2 tbsps soy sauce (I used about 1 1/2 T)
2 green onions (scallions sliced thin)
1 tbsp sesame seeds (toasted in a dry pan)

1. Preheat oven to 425 F. Wash radishes, trim ends, peel if needed, and cut into same size pieces. Cut the white icicle radishes into diagonal pieces, and the red ones into half or fourths, depending on how big they were. Cut green onions into thin slices.

2. Toss radishes with peanut oil, then roast about 20 minutes, stirring one or two times. When radishes are tender and starting to brown, remove from oven, toss with soy sauce to coat and mix in green onion slices. Put back in oven and roast about 5 minutes more.

3. During final five minutes roasting time, put the sesame seed in a dry pan and toast over hot stove for about 2 minutes, or until starting to brown. Remove radishes from oven, place in serving bowl and sprinkle with toasted sesame seeds. Serve hot.

Recipe adapted from Vegetables Every Day by Jack Bishop.

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/sesame/

Star Anise



Star anise is the unusual fruit of a small oriental tree. It is, as the name suggests, star shaped, radiating between five and ten pointed boat-shaped sections, about eight on average. These hard sections are seed pods. Tough skinned and rust coloured, they measure up to 3cm (1-1/4") long. The fruit is picked before it can ripen, and dried. The stars are available whole, or ground to a red-brown powder.

Bouquet: Powerful and liquorice-like, more pungent and stronger than anise.

Flavour: Evocative of a bitter aniseed, of which flavour star anise is a harsher version. Nervertheless, the use of star anise ensures an authentic touch in the preparation of certain Chinese dishes.

Hotness Scale: 3

Cooking with Star Anise

The whole stars can be added directly to the cooking pot; pieces are variously referred to as segments, points and sections. Otherwise, grind the whole stars as required. Small amounts are used, as the spice is powerful.

Star anise is used in the East as aniseed is in the West. Apart from its use in sweetmeats and confectionery, where sweeteners must be added, it contributes to meat and poultry dishes, combining especially well with pork and duck.

In Chinese red cooking, where the ingredients are simmered for a lengthy period in dark soy sauce, star anise is nearly always added to beef and chicken dishes. Chinese stocks and soups very often contain the spice.. It flavours marbled eggs, a decorative Chinese hors d'oeuvre or snack. Mandarins with jaded palates chew the whole dried fruit habitually as a post-prandial digestant and breath sweetener – an oriental comfit.

In the West, star anise is added in fruit compotes and jams, and in the manufacture of anise-flavoured liqueurs, the best known being anisette.

It is an ingredient of the mixture known as "Chinese Five Spice".

Star anise pairs brilliantly with tomatoes. It's licorice-like flavor actually bears a close resemblance to that of fennel and basil, tomato's classic companions. A single pod of star anise adds a new level of flavour to a tomato-based sauce or stew with a warm, spicy undertone. The same goes for braised beef dishes – from stews to chili to oxtail soup, star anise can be the secret ingredient that elevates the dish to a whole new level.

Health Benefits of Star Anise

Like anise, star anise has carminative, stomachic, stimulant and diuretic properties. In the East it is used to combat colic and rheumatism. It is a common flavouring for medicinal teas, cough mixtures and pastilles.

The anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties of star anise is useful in the treatment of asthma, bronchitis and dry cough. For this reason, some cough mixtures contain star anise extract.

Star anise, in its natural form, can help the body's immune system fight off many strains of flu, as well as many other health challenges. Star anise can also be used as for its sedating properties to ensure a good sleep.

The oil of star anise is useful in providing relief from rheumatism and lower back pain. Star anise can also be used as a natural breath freshener. Linalool, a compound present in star anise contains anti-oxidants properties.

Carrot Ginger Soup with Star Anise Recipe

3 tbsps unsalted butter
2 lbs carrots (peeled and chopped)
1 onion (diced)
2 cloves garlic (minced)
1 tbsp ginger (freshly grated)
1 bay leaf
4 cups chicken stock (or low-sodium broth)
5 whole Epicentre star anise (two for grating as garnish, optional)
1/4 cup cream
Epicentre Aleppo pepper or cayenne pepper (to taste)
coarse salt (to taste)

1. In a large pot over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the onions and cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the garlic, 3 star anise and ginger and cook, stirring constantly for 2 more minutes.
2. Add the carrots, stock and bay leaf and simmer until the carrots are tender, about 25 minutes. Remove the bay leaf and star anise.
3. Using a stick blender or by placing the mixture into a blender in batches, puree until smooth. Return to the pot, add the cream and bring to a low simmer. Season with salt and cayenne.

4. Top with additional grated star anise if you want a stronger licorice flavor.

Adapted from a recipe by Maureen Petrosky

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/star-anise/



Sumac

Sumac comes from the berries of a wild bush that grows wild in all Mediterranean areas, especially in Sicily and southern Italy, and parts of the Middle East, notably Iran. It is an essential ingredient in Arabic cooking, being preferred to lemon for sourness and astringency. Many other varieties of sumac occur in temperate regions of the world. In North America *Rhus glabra* is known for its use in the tanning industry and for its medicinal properties.

Bouquet: Slightly aromatic.
Flavour: Sour, fruity and astringent
Hotness Scale: 1

Cooking with Sumac

Sumac is used widely in cookery in Arabia, Turkey and the Levant, and especially in Lebanese cuisine. In these areas it is a major souring agent, used where other regions would employ lemon, tamarind or vinegar. It is rubbed on to kebabs before grilling and may be used in this way with fish or chicken.

The berries can be dried, ground and sprinkled into the cooking, or macerated in hot water and mashed to release their juice, the resulting liquid being used as one might use lemon juice.

The juice extracted from sumac is popular in salad dressings and marinades and the powdered form is used in stews and vegetable and chicken casseroles. "The seed of Sumach eaten in sauces with meat, stoppeth all manner of fluxes of the belly…" (Gerard, 1597) A mixture of yogurt and sumac is often served with kebabs.

Health Benefits of Sumac

The berries have diuretic properties, and are used in bowel complaints and for reducing fever. In the Middle East, a sour drink is made from them to relieve stomach upsets.

Sumac-Spiced Eggplant Schnitzel Recipe

1 large eggplant
2 1/4 cups fresh breadcrumbs
2 tablespoons Epicentre sumac
1 tablespoon Parmesan cheese, finely grated
1 tablespoon mint, finely chopped

1 tablespoon flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
finely grated zest of half a lemon
sea salt and pepper
2 eggs
dash of milk
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
olive oil, for frying
lemon wedges, for garnish

1. Cut the eggplant into 3/4 inch-thick slices.
2. Combine the breadcrumbs, half of the sumac, the Parmesan, mint, parsley, lemon zest and seasoning.
3. Whisk the eggs with the dash of milk and place the flour in a bowl or plate. Dust the eggplant slices with flour, dip them in the egg mix, then coat with the breadcrumbs.
4. Heat the olive oil in a large non-stick frying pan and fry the eggplant slowly, in batches for about 3–4 minutes or until golden brown on both sides.
5. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Season with a little salt, and sprinkle with the remaining sumac.

Adapted from a recipe by Maria Elia, The Modern Vegetarian

see more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/sumac/

Szechuan Pepper



Szechuan peppers is native to the Szechwan province of China. Though they bear some resemblance to black peppercorns, they are not actually of the pepper family, but the dried berry of a tree of the rue family. Several Zanthoxylum species grow throughout the temperate belt of China, Japan, the Himalayas and North America. They all have similarities, being aromatic and used in herbal remedies. Only the pipertium variety of the East is useful for cooking.

Szechuan peppercorns are rust coloured with hair-thin stems and open ends. The dried berries resemble tiny beechnuts measuring 4 – 5 mm in diameter. The rough skin splits open to reveal a brittle black seed, about 3 mm in diameter, however the spice mainly consists of the empty husks. It is available whole or ground.

In Japan the leaves are used as spice — the ground dried leaves are known as sansho and the whole leaves, kinome, are fresh, vacuum-packed or pickled.

Bouquet: the berries are warm and pepperlike. The leaves have a citrus fragrance.
Flavour: the berries are mildly peppery, woodsy and acrid. The leaves are milder more citrus.
Hotness Scale: 4

Cooking with Szechuan Pepper

Originating from the Szechuan province of China, Szechuan pepper is associated with dishes from that region which feature hotter and spicier cooking than the rest of China. Duck and chicken dishes in particular work well with the spice. Hua jiao yen is a mixture of salt and Szechuan pepper, roasted and browned in a wok and served as a condiment to accompany chicken, duck and pork dishes. Star anise and ginger are often used with it and figures prominently in Szechuan cuisine.

Szechuan pepper is one of the few spices important for Tibetan and Bhutani cookery of the Himalayas, because few spices can be grown there. The national dish of Tibet are momos, a pasta stuffed with yak and flavoured with Szechuan pepper, garlic, ginger and onion. The noodles are steamed and served dry, together with a fiery chile sauce.

In Japan the dried and powdered leaves of the same species of prickly ash is known as sansho and used to make noodle dishes and soups mildly hot and fragrant. The whole leaves, kinome, are used to flavour vegetables, especially bamboo shoots, and to decorate soups. Szechuan pepper is an ingredient in Chinese five-spice powder and shichimi togarashi, a Japanese seven-flavour seasoning.

Health Benefits of Szechuan Pepper

The berries are carminative and anti-spasmodic. The North American prickly ash is known as the 'Toothache Tree' because the powdered bark was used as a toothache remedy and to heal wounds. The bark and berries are stimulative and used as a blood purifier and digestive.

Szechuan Pepper Shrimp

2 lb. shrimp in the shell
1 tsp. ground Epicentre Szechuan pepper
2 tsp. sea salt
2 Tbs. vegetable oil
4 garlic cloves, minced
Lemon wedges for serving

1. In a bowl, stir together the shrimp, 1/2 tsp. of the ground Szechuan pepper and 1 tsp. of the salt. Set aside.
2. Heat a wok over high heat and pour in the oil. Add the garlic, the remaining 1/2 tsp. ground Szechuan pepper and 1 tsp. salt and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the shrimp and cook until opaque throughout, 3 to 4 minutes.
3. Serve immediately with lemon wedges. Serves 6 to 8.

Adapted from Cooking for Friends, by Alison Attenborough and Jamie Kimm (Oxmoor House, 2008).

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/szechuan-pepper/



Tamarind

Believed to originate in East Africa, tamarind now grows extensively throughout the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and the West Indies. Tamarind means 'date of India' In Hindu mythology, tamarind is associated with the wedding of the god Krishna which is celebrated by a feast in November.

In Victorian times, the British in Goa kept a tamarind in one ear when venturing into the native quarter to keep themselves free from harassment because the locals believed the fresh pods were inhabited by malevolent demons. This earned the colonials the nickname 'Lugimlee' or 'tamarind heads', and it has stuck to this day. Tamarind is an excellent brass and copper polish. Take a slab of tamarind, sprinkle on some salt, wet it and rub it directly on the object to be polished.

Tamarind is from a curved brown bean-pod from the tamarind tree. The pod contains a sticky pulp enclosing one to ten shiny black seeds. It is the pulp that is used as a flavouring for its sweet, sour, fruity aroma and taste. It is available as a pressed fibrous slab, or as a jamlike bottled concentrate, and some Indian shops carry the dried pods.

Bouquet: a slightly fruity aroma.
Flavour: a refreshing sour taste
Hotness Scale: 1

Preparation of Tamarind Pulp

If using the tamarind slab, steep a little in hot water for ten minutes, mash into a paste and pass through a sieve. The fine tamarind pulp and juice will go through, leaving behind the fibrous husk. Tamarind slabs and paste store well and will last for up to a year. Tamarind pods will last indefinitely as they require maceration to release their juice.

Cooking with Tamarind Paste

Usually it is the juice or paste that is used as a souring agent, particularly in south Indian and Gujarati lentil dishes, curries and chutneys, where its flavour is more authentic than vinegar or lemon juice. It may be used to flavour pulse dishes, rice dishes, or as an ingredient in sauces and side dishes for pork, fowl and fish. Tamarind contains pectin which is used in the manufacturing process of commercially produced jams, so it is a natural ingredient in many jams, jellies, fruit drinks, and is vital to Worcestershire sauce. In India, the ground seed is used in cakes. A refreshing drink made from tamarind syrup and resembling lemonade is quite popular in the Middle East.

Tamarind Health Benefits

Tamarind is considered a mild laxative and digestive. It is used to treat bronchial disorders and gargling with tamarind water is recommended for a sore throat. It is antiseptic, used

in eye-baths and for the treatment of ulcers. Being highly acidic, it is a refrigerant (cooling in the heat) and febrifuge (for fighting fevers). The Ananga Ranga suggests consuming tamarind for enhancing a woman's sexual enjoyment.

Tamarind And Dark Beer-Glazed Wings

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 clove garlic, minced
1 1-inch piece ginger root, peeled and smashed
1 bottle dark beer (we used Newcastle)
2 tablespoons tamarind chutney (available at any Indian or Middle Eastern grocery)
1 teaspoon agave nectar
kosher salt
6 chicken wings, separated at the joint (12 total pieces)
1 tablespoon canola oil
a few dashes hot sauce (optional)

1. Melt the butter in a small saucepan over medium heat and sauté the garlic and smashed ginger until fragrant, 2-3 minutes, stirring frequently.
2. Add the tamarind, agave nectar and hot sauce (if using), stir to coat completely, then slowly add the beer to prevent it from foaming over.
3. Bring to a light boil, then lower to a simmer and cook until reduced by half or until the glaze coats the back of a spoon.
4. Season the chicken wings lightly with Kosher salt.
5. Heat the canola oil in a large non-stick skillet over medium high heat and brown the chicken wings for 8-10 minutes, turning once.
6. Preheat the oven to 375F, then transfer the wings to a foil-lined baking sheet.
7. Use a basting brush to apply a thick layer of glaze to the wings, then bake for 10 minutes, glaze again and bake for another 10 minutes.

Recipe by Jess Kapadia

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/tamarind/

Thai Coconut Green Curry Powder



Thai Coconut Green Curry Powder (from The Epicentre) adds an exotic combination of spicy/sweet flavour to soups, sauces, rice, noodles, fish and chicken. Green Thai chiles and exotic spices tempered with sweet coconut powder, lime and a little brown sugar, resulting in a perfectly balanced Thai curry with a kick.

Sweet Potato Salad with Canberries & Pecans

4 lbs sweet potato (2 or 3 large), peeled and cut into 3/4-inch cubes)
1/2 cup mayonnaise
2 tsps Epicentre Thai Coconut Green Curry Powder
1 tsp ground mustard
2 sliced green onions
1 cup dried cranberries
1/2 cup chopped pecans (roughly, lightly toasted)
salt and pepper to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and lightly grease a baking sheet. Place the cubed sweet potatoes on the sheet and bake until cooked but firm, about 35-40 minutes.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together the mayonnaise, curry powder and mustard. Stir in the green onions, cranberries, pecans and cooked sweet potatoes. Adjust seasonings and add salt and pepper to taste. Chill for at least three hours before serving.



True North (by Southwest)

True North (by Southwest) from The Epicentre. Real organic maple (not an artificial sweetner) mellows the kick of chipotle, cayenne, paprika and ancho chiles with Southwestern herbs and spices. Brilliant as a rub for pork, chicken, salmon or shrimp; it also adds rich flavour to bean dishes, salsas and grilled vegetables.

True North by Southwest Salmon

4 (6-ounce) skinless salmon fillets
2 tablespoons olive oil
1-2 tbsp Epicentre True North by SW
Kosher Salt

1. Coat the salmon with olive oil and rub in the True North Spice by SW mixture. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hours.

2. Heat the oil over medium heat in a skillet. Sprinkle the salmon fillets with salt, place them in the pan, and cook gently until well browned and just cooked through, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Transfer the salmon to warm plates and serve immediately.

Spiced Pork Tenderloin

1 pork tenderloin
1-2 tbsp Epicentre True North by SW

1. Coat pork tenderloin with spice rub.
2. Cover and refrigerate from 30 minutes up to 2 days to allow flavours to penetrate.
3. Remove from refrigerator and bring to room temperature. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. With a small amount of cooking oil brown the meat on all sides over medium heat in a heavy bottomed pan.
4. Prepare an oven pan with greased foil or place meat on a rack and cook for aprox. 25 to 35 min. A meat thermometer should read between 155 and 170 degrees, depending on desired doneness.



Turmeric

Turmeric is an ancient spice, a native of South East Asia, used from antiquity as dye and a condiment. It is cultivated primarily in Bengal, China, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Java. Peru. Australia and the West Indies. It is still used in rituals of the Hindu religion, and as a dye for holy robes, being natural, unsynthesized and cheap. Turmeric is in fact one of the cheapest spices. Although as a dye it is used similarly to saffron, the culinary uses of the two spices should not be confused and should never replace saffron in food dishes. Its use dates back nearly 4000 years, to the Vedic culture in India where it was used as a culinary spice and had some religious significance. The name derives from the Latin terra merita "meritorious earth" referring to the colour of ground turmeric which resembles a mineral pigment. In many languages turmeric is simply named as "yellow root".

Turmeric is the rhizome or underground stem of a ginger-like plant. It is usually available ground, as a bright yellow, fine powder. The whole turmeric is a tuberous rhizome, with a rough, segmented skin. The rhizome is yellowish-brown with a dull orange interior that looks bright yellow when powdered. The main rhizome measures 2.5 – 7 cm (1" – 3 ") in length with a diameter of 2.5 cm (1"), with smaller tubers branching off.

Bouquet: Earthy and slightly acrid.
Flavour: Warm and aromatic with a bitter undertone.
Hotness Scale: 3

Cooking with Turmeric

Turmeric is always used in ground form. The powder will maintain its colouring properties indefinitely though the flavour will diminish over time so buy in moderation.

Turmeric is used extensively in the East and Middle East as a condiment and culinary dye. In India it is used to tint many sweet dishes. Apart from its wide use in Moroccan cuisine to spice meat, particularly lamb, and vegetables, its principal place is in curries and curry powders. It is used in many fish curries, possibly because it successfully masks fishy odours. When used in curry powders, it is usually one of the main ingredients, providing the associated yellow colour.

Health Benefits of Turmeric

Turmeric is a mild digestive, being aromatic, a stimulant and a carminative. An ointment base on the spice is used as an antiseptic in Malaysia. Turmeric water is an Asian cosmetic applied to impart a golden glow to the complexion. Curcumin has been shown to be active against Staphlococcus aureus (pus-producing infections)

Turmeric Tea

Turmeric tends to stain anything it comes into contact with, so be careful.

1/3 cup / 80 ml good, raw honey

2 1/2 teaspoons dried turmeric

lemon

lots of freshly ground black pepper

1. Work the turmeric into the honey until it forms a paste. You can keep this on hand, in a jar, for whenever you'd like a cup.
2. For each cup of tea, place a heaping teaspoon of the turmeric paste in the bottom of a mug. Pour hot (but not boiling water) into the mug, and stir well to dissolve the turmeric paste. Add a big squeeze of juice from a lemon, and a good amount of black pepper. Enjoy! Stir now and then as you drink so all the good stuff doesn't settle to the bottom, or top off with more hot water as you drink it.



Vanilla

Next to saffron and cardamom, vanilla is the worlds next most expensive spice. Growers are known to "brand" their beans with pin pricks before they can be harvested, to identify the owner and prevent theft. Vanilla is native to Mexico, where it is still grown commercially. Vanilla was used by the Aztecs for flavouring their royal drink xocolatl – a mixture of cocoa beans, vanilla and honey. Cortez brought vanilla back to Europe in the sixteenth century, after having observed Montezuma drinking the cocoa concoction.

Ice cream producers are unlikely to point out that their most popular flavour derives its name from the Latin word *vagina*. For ancient Romans, vagina meant sheath or scabbard. The Spanish adopted the word as *vaina*, which developed a diminutive form, vainilla, meaning "little sheath". The Spanish made this diminutive the name of the plant because its pods resemble sheaths.

Bouquet: highly fragrant and aromatic

Flavour: rich, full, aromatic and powerful. Madagascar and Mexico making the best quality. Indonesian and Tahitian vanilla is weaker and considered inferior.

Hotness Scale:1

Culinary Uses

Vanilla's mellow fragrance enhances a variety of sweet dishes: puddings, cakes, custards, creams, soufflés and, of course, ice cream. Classic examples include crème caramel, peach Melba and apple Charlotte. Vanilla flavour is detectable in many chocolate and confectionery items and several liqueurs such as Crème de Cacao and Galliano.

Vanilla extract is made by percolating alcohol and water through chopped, cured beans, somewhat like making coffee. Vanilla extract is very powerful, a few drops sufficing for most uses.

Vanilla bean is a bit more time consuming to use than the extract, but imparts the stongest vanilla flavour without the alcohol of extract. To flavour a liquid base for creme sauces, puddings, ice creams, etc., allow one bean per pint to steep in the liquid by boiling and allowing to cool for an hour before removing the bean. This can be repeated a few times if the bean is washed after use, dried and kept airtight. Ground vanilla can also be used, but use half as much and leave in the liquid.

Many recipes call for slitting the bean lengthwise and scraping out the tiny black seeds.

Vanilla Sugar

A good way to store whole vanilla is to bury it in sugar. Use a jar with a tight-fitting lid that will hold about a pound of sugar, burying the bean so that no light can reach it. After 2 -3 weeks the sugar tastes of vanilla and can be used in coffee or in other recipes and the bean can be removed for other uses and returned to the sugar after cleaning. Keep topping up the sugar.

Health Benefits of Vanilla

From the time of the Aztecs, vanilla was considered an aphrodisiac. This reputation was much enhanced in 1762 when a German study found that a medication based on vanilla extract cured impotence — all 342 smiling subjects claimed they were cured. It was also once believed that vanilla was a febrifuge, used to reduce fevers, though it is rarely used for any medicinal purposes other than as a pharmaceutical flavouring.

Vanilla Madeleines

Madeleine batter can be refrigerated for up to 2 days. Madeleines are best the day they are made, but they can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 2 days.

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

Coarse salt

6 large eggs, room temperature

1 cup granulated sugar

2 tablespoons packed light-brown sugar

2 sticks unsalted butter, melted, plus more, softened, for pans

1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon honey

3/4 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

1. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and 3/4 teaspoon salt in a medium bowl.
2. Whisk together eggs and granulated and brown sugars with a mixer on high speed until pale and fluffy, about 10 minutes. Sift flour mixture over top in 2 additions, folding in after each addition. Fold in melted butter in 2 additions, then honey and vanilla. Refrigerate, covered, for at least 2 hours.
3. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Let batter stand at room temperature for 10 minutes. Generously butter 2 standard-size or 2 mini nonstick or aluminum madeleine pans using a pastry brush.
4. Transfer batter to a pastry bag, and snip tip to create a 1/2-inch opening. Pipe some batter into molds, filling each about three-quarters full. Bake on middle rack until pale gold, 8 to 11 minutes (6 to 8 minutes for mini madeleines). Immediately shake madeleines out. Wash and rebutter molds. Repeat with remaining batter. Dust baked madeleines with confectioners' sugar.

Recipe from Martha Stewart Living, September 2011

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/vanilla



Zatar

Also known as zahtar or zatar this spice blend is predominately ground sumac, roasted sesame seeds, and green herbs. Zatar is used to flavour meats and vegetables, or mixed with olive oil and used as a marinade for olives or as a spread for pita or flatbread. The taste of a zatar mixture can be tangy, herbal, nutty, or toasty.

Zatar is both a family of herbs and an herb, Thymbra spicata, with a slight minty tendency, in the marjoram/oregano family. Some are salty flavoured and quite rare, some are lemony. Za'atar is not sumac; what is sold commercially is often blended with sumac and lightly toasted sesame seeds, but the base of the zatar blend is za'atar herbs.

Marjoram is much milder than the oregano we usually find, Western blends usually use it along with oregano and thyme. In the East, thyme is "zaatar romi"(roman zaatar), and oregano is "zaatar ach'dar"(green zaatar) and so forth. Zatar can also be the name of hyssop or a varied mixture of herbs. Commercial blends will often contain three kinds of zaatar and sumac.

Zatar Lamb Chops

4 lamb chops

1 1/2 tablespoons Epicentre zatar

Olive oil for drizzling

Sauce

1/4 cup plain yogurt

1 tablespoon Epicentre harissa (very spicy, alter to your liking)

1 teaspoon honey

Lamb:

Heat a grill pan on medium-high to high. Dredge the lamb in the zatar, and drizzle with olive oil. Sear the lamb chops 3 minutes per side. Serve with the spicy, creamy dipping sauce.

Sauce:

Whisk to combine.

Roasted Carrots with Zatar

1. Preheat 2 baking sheets in a 450 degree oven.
2. Quarter 4 pounds carrots lengthwise and toss with 1/4 cup olive oil and 3/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper. Spread on the hot baking sheets and roast until browned, 18 to 20 minutes.
3. Toss with 4 teaspoons Epicentre Zatar , 3 tablespoons chopped parsley and the juice of 1 lemon.

See more at: http://theepicentre.com/spice/zaatar/



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