

Growing and Cooking with Herbs & Spices



The Healing Spice Cabinet

Herbs and spices are a key component of healing foods, imparting taste, texture, aroma and nutrition.

Cornell University researchers examined 4,500 recipes from 100 cookbooks. They found that 93% contained at least one spice, with the average amount of spices per dish to be four. That average is a minimum for in the healing cuisines of Indian, Thai, China and the Mediterranean. American food by comparison is bland and lack fresh spices, relying on sugar, salt, artificial flavors and colors.

Many Americans have lost interest in cooking and rely on take out or prepackaged, foods with numerous additives and preservatives, high in calories and low in nutrients and flavor. Eating this way is unsatisfying and unhealthy. When people eat fresh, natural food, they awaken an innate food intelligence that has been muted by a lifetime of poor eating habits and choices. Herbs and spices are nature's way of reminding us that its *thyme* to wake up and *Eat for Health™*.

Herbs and Spices

1. Give food a mouthwatering aroma that stimulates the appetite
2. Blend in new taste sensations
3. Impart layers of flavor, such as sweet, salty, savory, sour, hot
4. Serve as natural tenderizer for meats and gluten grains
5. Add body and texture to dishes, acting as thickeners and binders for sauces
6. Color a dish, making it a feast for the eyes
7. Promote a robust digestive process
8. Improve liver detoxification, immune function and tissue healing

Examples of the Multiple Uses of Spices

- Turmeric adds a bitter flavor, brilliant orange color, and promotes digestion, healing of inflamed tissues and improved liver and immune functions.
- Coriander, the seed of the cilantro plant, can be used as a sweet spice with cereal, yogurt and fruit, as well as a thickener to sauces, imparting a nutty, aromatic flavor.
- Ginger root makes a delicious tea, spice for stir fry dishes, flavor for cookies, tonic for sluggish digestion and to alleviate nausea

Cooking with Herbs and Spices

In India and Indonesia, spices such as garlic, ginger, turmeric, chili are added to hot oil at the beginning of a dish to infuse the meats and vegetables that will be sautéed in them with a savory flavor. Then, later in the cooking process, the more delicate flavors from herbs such as basil, cilantro and dill will be added to finish the dish, or as a garnish to balance and cool the hot spices used earlier in the preparation.

The contrast and blending of flavors is what creates a rich and enjoyable experience for the eater and for his or her metabolic system, which responds to the symphony of taste, texture and nutrition of the culinary composition.

Herbal Cultivation: Originally, herbs grew wild in the woods, by streams and paths, and were sought out by animals for food and healing. Today, most herbs are not wild-crafted, but rather are grown commercially and sold fresh at farmers or road side markets. Dried culinary and medicinal herbs fetch a good price at natural health food stores or herbal apothecaries. Herbs do not require rich soil, abundant water or sunlight. The culinary herbs we will be featuring grow beautifully with the natural agriculture, where annuals and perennial plants are allowed to grow at their own pace without fertilizer or additional soil amendments. Healthy herbs, grown in healthy soil, provide concentrated macro and micro-nutrients, volatile oils and bioflavonoids that support tissue growth and repair, improve circulation, enhance digestion, absorption and cellular detoxification. They are nature's antidote to pollution, stress, and malnutrition that lead to chronic inflammation, which over time leads to depletion of our nervous, endocrine, immune, respiratory and muscular skeletal systems. Using herbs and spices at every meal as teas and seasonings provide wonderful booster foods to turn ordinary dishes into S.O.U.L. (seasonal, organic, unprocessed and local) satisfying meals that send a positive message to our genes and cells to **celebrate life** and perform optimally and efficiently.

Culinary herbs are herbaceous (leafy) plants that add flavor and color to all types of meals. They have been used for centuries to preserve food due to the presence of antioxidant phytochemicals. The flavors are provided by the essential oils and oleoresins (natural plant substances) and the pungency or strength of the flavors is due to the alkaloid (organic compound) content. The antioxidant content of the herb can vary from plant to plant based upon where the herb was grown, the maturity of the plant when harvested, the plant variety and the part of the herb used. Herbs grown using natural agriculture mature slowly and as such have a superior taste, nutrient composition and influence on one's metabolism. Home grown herbs and spices are **not irradiated**, which required of all **commercially** grown and distributed herbal products.

The parts of the plants used include the seeds, flowers, leaves and roots. If you find that low fat or low salt foods taste bland, you can use herbs to enhance the flavor of virtually any dish, including desserts. Generally, herbs are delicately flavored, so add them to your cooking in the last few minutes. It helps to taste test. Too few herbs will contribute nothing to your dish, while too many will overpower the other subtle tastes.

Health Benefits: Herbs play a significant role in the prevention and management of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, allergy, asthma, obesity, depression and cognitive decline. International research is released on a regular basis confirming the health benefits of a plant based diet, supplemented with an array of herbs and spices. Little of this comes from the US, where pharmacology is the dominant paradigm. For example:

Garlic, linseed, fenugreek (Sharma & Raghuram Nutr Res 1990), **lemon grass** help lower total and LDL cholesterol; garlic (half to one clove per day) also lowers triglycerides without affecting HDL cholesterol levels (Warshafsky et al., Ann Internal Med 1993).

🌱 **Garlic** is useful for people with mild hypertension

🌱 **Garlic, onions, linseed, ginger** help inhibit blood clots

🌱 **Fenugreek, linseed/flaxseed, cinnamon, garlic, onions, bay leaves, cloves, cumin,** turmeric (Broadhurst et al., J Agric Food Chem 2000) help improve glucose control or insulin activity

🌱 **Garlic, onions, chives, leeks, mint, basil, oregano, sage, thyme, rosemary, parsley, linseed, ginger, turmeric, dill, celery, coriander, fennel, cumin, anise, caraway** help protect against cancer.

Herbs, such as rosemary, sage, oregano, thyme, cilantro and parsley have significant amounts of flavonoids which can act as antioxidants to protect LDL cholesterol from being oxidized and they can inhibit the formation of blood clots and provide anti-inflammatory and anti-tumor activity. A study published in 2002 in

the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (Knekt et al) showed that a higher intake of plant bioflavonoids is linked to lower incidence of heart disease and stroke, and is more protective than Statin drugs.

Lemongrass and **mint** help block the production of cholesterol. Fenugreek is high in saponins and soluble fiber which helps decrease the absorption of cholesterol from food and which can help lower blood glucose levels in people with diabetes. Subjects consuming bread containing 25% linseed showed about 30% improvement in a glucose tolerance test compared with those who ate plain bread (Cunnane et al., Br J Nutr 1993).

Ginger contains a number of natural terpenoid and phenolic phytochemicals that inhibit the formation of blood clots. Ginger has been used both traditionally and in modern medicine to assist pregnant women with managing morning sickness. Ginger and turmeric also contain curcuminoids which are thought to prevent cancer development.

Cinnamon: Studies in rats have shown that cinnamon lowers blood glucose and cholesterol levels. A new study published in Diabetes Care in December 2003 has shown that small amounts of cinnamon in humans can lower blood glucose, cholesterol and triglycerides. Sixty Pakistani men and women were divided into 6 groups and given 1, 3 or 6 grams of cinnamon (Cassia - red brown variety) or similar amounts of placebo for 40 days. Blood glucose and lipids dropped on average by 20% and remained low for 20 days after intake was stopped. Also, the impact on blood levels was the same at all doses i.e. there was no dose response - so 1g was as effective as 6g. Cinnamon has also been found to enhance insulin activity (Imparl-Radosevich et al., 1998 Hormone Research).

Spice Up Your Life: Culinary herbs and spices can be used in a variety of creative ways. You can add them to
· Soups, · Breads· Mustards· Marinades · Butters · Sauces · Salad dressings · Stocks · Vinegars · Desserts · Drinks

Tips for Cooking with Herbs

- 🍃 Utensils for preparing fresh herbs include scissors, sharp knife and a chopping board.
- 🍃 Utensils for preparing dried herbs include a grinding mill, or a pestle and mortar.
- 🍃 Use wooden utensils when mixing prepared herbs.
- 🍃 Dried herbs are more strongly flavored than fresh. One t. dried herbs equals four t. of fresh.
- 🍃 If you regularly use herbs in your cooking, it may save you time to prepare your own '*bouquet garni*' stash. Parcel your chopped and mixed herbs in little muslin bags. Add a *bouquet garni* during the last stages of cooking.
- 🍃 Unlike other herbs, parsley retains its flavor during the cooking process and can be added at the start.
- 🍃 Fresh herbs have a more pungent flavor due to the higher content of fragrant essential oils and antioxidants. During the herb drying process there is a loss of oils and nutrients.
- 🍃 The flavor of herbs diminishes with time; discard stored dried herbs after 12 months.
- 🍃 Dried whole herbs i.e. where the leaves are still attached to their stalk tend to be "fresher" and have a nicer and more "pungent" flavor than loose leaves sold in packets/bottles. Dried whole herbs such as oregano and sage can be purchased from Mediterranean or Middle Eastern delicatessens.

Wonderful Herb and Food Combinations

Try combining herbs as follows

- 🍃 Basil - pesto, tomato sauce, tomato soup, tomato juice, potato dishes, prawns, meat, chicken and poultry, pasta, rice, egg dishes.
- 🍃 Bay - soups, stews, casseroles, meat and poultry marinades, stocks.
- 🍃 Chili - meat, chicken and poultry, prawns, shellfish, tomato dishes, curries.

- ✔ Chives - salads, chicken, soups, cheese dishes, egg dishes, mayonnaise, vinaigrettes.
- ✔ Coriander - Asian dishes, stir fries, curries, soups, salads, seafood.
- ✔ Dill - salads, sauces, fish, salad, sour cream, cheese and potato dishes.
- ✔ Fennel - stuffing, sauces, seafood.
- ✔ Garlic - soups, sauces, pasta, meat, chicken, shellfish, pesto, salad dressings, and bread.
- ✔ Ginger - cakes, biscuits, Asian dishes.
- ✔ Lemongrass - Asian dishes, stir fries, curries, seafood, soups, tea.
- ✔ Marjoram - meat, fish, egg dishes, cheese dishes, pizza.
- ✔ Mint - drinks, confectionary, meat, chicken, yoghurt, desserts, sauces, vegetable dishes.
- ✔ Oregano - cheese dishes, egg dishes, tomato sauce, pizza, meat, stuffing, bread, pasta.
- ✔ Parsley - pesto, egg dishes, pasta, rice dishes, salads, butter, sauces, seafood, vegetable dishes.
- ✔ Rosemary - fish, poultry, meat, bread, sauces, soups.
- ✔ Sage - stuffing, tomato dishes, cheese dishes.
- ✔ Tarragon - salad dressing, egg dishes.
- ✔ Thyme - chowders, bread, poultry, soups, stock, stews, stuffing, butter, cheese, mustard, vinegar.

Herb and Spice Combinations

- ✔ Basil - goes with chives, chili, garlic, oregano.
- ✔ Bay - goes with parsley, thyme, garlic, oregano, marjoram.
- ✔ Chili - goes with coriander, garlic, ginger, lemongrass, mint, oregano.
- ✔ Chives - go with basil, garlic, tarragon.
- ✔ Dill - goes with chives, garlic, parsley, tarragon.
- ✔ Garlic - goes with basil, rosemary, sage, fennel, chili, coriander.
- ✔ Sage - goes with rosemary, garlic, marjoram.
- ✔ Thyme - goes with bay, parsley, garlic, rosemary.
- ✔ Oregano - goes with basil, parsley, chives, thyme, bay, chili

