

12 Great Ways to Use...

Spices

It's a smart idea to find ways to flavor your food with spices, which provide both a regional and a cultural identity to whatever you prepare, along with many health benefits. Spices are made from the aromatic dried buds, flowers, fruits, seeds, berries, bark, and roots of plants. They can add both flavor and antioxidants to your food and help you wean your palate from salt, which many of us rely upon too much for its familiar flavor. Start with adding just a little spice (measure about ¼ teaspoon) to familiar foods and go from there. Here's a quick look at some popular spices, from A to Z! Experiment with just one, and then combine several to come up with your own flavors.

- 1. Allspice** tastes like several spices at once--pepper, cloves, and nutmeg. Crush whole berries in a spice mill or with a mortar and pestle. Sprinkle on baked squash or add to cooked beans.
- 2. Cayenne**, which is ground hot red chili pepper, boosts the flavor and adds a little kick to sauces, stews, and seafood dishes. Or, instead of butter, sprinkle it on popcorn.
- 3. Cinnamon** is a good spice for applesauce or stewed fruit. Sprinkle a little on ground coffee before brewing.
- 4. Coriander** comes from the seeds of the cilantro plant. Sprinkle it dried into chili and bean dishes.
- 5. Cumin** is an important Middle Eastern spice. Stir it into Greek yogurt for an instant dip or sauce for wraps, or sprinkle a little bit on hummus.
- 6. Curry powder** is a mixture of spices and a great convenience for busy cooks. Add a pinch or two to chicken or tuna salad, or toss it with potatoes or sweet potatoes before roasting.
- 7. Ginger** spices up fruit salad or sliced melon. Or, dust it over carrots, squash, or sweet potatoes before roasting.
- 8. Nutmeg** works well in quiches, sautéed spinach and other greens, and cheese sauces served with pasta. Buy a few whole nutmegs, keep them in a tightly sealed jar, and grate them against the small holes of a box grater.
- 9. Paprika** is not just for sprinkling on hard-cooked eggs. Look for "smoked paprika," which has a pungent, hot flavor that wakes up grain dishes, seafood and vegetable stews, hummus, and dips of all kinds.
- 10. Pepper** tastes best when freshly ground. Use it to flavor avocados, pasta dishes, soups, stews, and vegetables. Use a little bit on top of melon or peach slices for a spicy dessert.
- 11. Turmeric** adds heightened flavor and a warm yellow color to rice and grain dishes. Or blend it with cumin for chilies and vegetable stews.
- 12. Za'atar** gets its flavor note from dried sumac berries. Its tart, sour, and fruity flavor is stronger and more memorable than lemon making it a good substitute. Blend with thyme, oregano, and olive oil and spread on pita bread before toasting.

