

Spice It Up!

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How do you get your family to the table and keep them healthy? Slash the fat. Shake the salt habit. Replace the sugar, fat, and salt in your favorite foods with spices and herbs. They will keep your family coming back to the table for healthy and tasty meals.

Allspice

- A mix of nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon.
- Use in desserts, cookies, and pies to add sweetness.
- Examples: fruit desserts, pumpkin pie, apple cider, and oatmeal raisin cookies.
- You can also use a pinch of allspice in beef and fish dishes.



Chives

- Use in potato dishes, soups, sauces, and dips.



Cilantro

- Great for Latin American, Indian, and Chinese dishes.
- Use in salsa, stir-fries, and legume or rice salads.
- Great on grilled chicken or fish.
- Shake cilantro on ripe tomatoes or add to salsa for a Mexican flavor!

Nutmeg

- Add to cooked fruits, pies, desserts, baked items, spinach, sweet potatoes, eggnog, and French toast for a warm, spicy, and sweet flavor.



Basil

- Use in Italian dishes like pasta, pizza, or other tomato dishes.
- Can also be used in egg dishes, stews, soups, and salads.



Cumin

- This curry powder is often used in Mexican, Middle Eastern, and Indian dishes.
- It can also be used to spice up your beef, lamb, and bean dishes, chili, marinades, and tomato sauces.



Ginger

- A little ginger can add a huge spice to Asian dishes, marinades for chicken or fish, and dressings for fruit salad.



Parsley

- Add parsley at the end of cooking meat, soup, and vegetable dishes to add color and a mild peppery taste.

Store spices in a cool, dry place to keep their flavor.

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How much of each spice or herb do I use?

If possible, start with a tested recipe from a reliable source. If you're creating your own recipe, try one or two spices or herbs at first. The amount to add varies with the type of spice or herb, the type of recipe, and your personal preference.



What if your recipe calls for fresh herbs and all you have are dried?

Here are some approximate amounts of different forms of herbs equivalent to each other.

- 1 tablespoon finely cut fresh herbs equals
- 1 teaspoon crumbled dried herbs equals
- 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon ground dried herbs

If you don't know how much of a spice or herb to use, follow these recommendations:

Begin with 1/4 teaspoon of most ground spices or ground dried herbs for 4 servings, 1 pound of meat, or 1 pint (2 cups) of soup or sauce. Add more if needed.

Remember to use more herbs if using a crumbled dried or a fresh form.

If using cayenne pepper and garlic powder start with 1/8 teaspoon and adjust as needed.

Red pepper intensifies in flavor during cooking, so add more in small amounts.

Sources

Cooking Basics: Cooking with Herbs, Spices, and Seasonings, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 348-686.

“Add a Little Spice (and Herbs) to Your Life!” University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, Alice Henneman, M.S., R.D.

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Doubling a Recipe

When doubling a recipe, DO NOT double spices and herbs. Instead, increase amounts by 1-1/2 times, taste, and then add more if needed.

When do I add a spice or herb to a meal?

As a general rule, add *fresh* herbs near the end of the cooking time or just before serving as prolonged heating can cause them to lose flavor and aroma.

Add the more *delicate* fresh herbs – basil, chives, cilantro, dill leaves, parsley, marjoram, and mint – a minute or two before the end of cooking or sprinkle them on the food before it's served.

The *less delicate* fresh herbs, such as dill seeds, oregano, rosemary, tarragon, and thyme, can be added for about the last 20 minutes of cooking.

The following tips and techniques will give you the best taste when adding dried spices and herbs during cooking.

- Dried *whole* spices and herbs, such as whole allspice and bay leaves, release their flavors slower than crumbled or ground ones. They are ideal for dishes cooking an hour or more, such as soups and stews. Remove bay leaves before serving as they can be a choking hazard.
- Dried *ground* spices and herbs release their flavor quickly. They may taste best in shorter-cooking recipes or added nearer the end of longer-cooking ones.
- Dried *crumbled* herbs may differ: *Milder* herbs, such as basil, may flavor best when added toward the end of cooking. More *robust* herbs, such as thyme, can stand longer cooking periods.
- *Freshly grinding* spices, such as black pepper and nutmeg, gives more flavor than buying them already ground. This also applies to using them in uncooked foods.