



14 HERBS AND SPICES

Allspice



This warm spice is popular ground in Mediterranean cooking. Although it tastes like a mixture of several spices, it is a single spice. It adds flavor to meat and poultry dishes and can be used in rice and vegetarian dishes.

A Herb Versus a Spice

Herbs are leaves from non-woody plants.

Spices are produced from any part of the plant except the leaves. They may be from bark, root, flowers and fruits.

Basil



Basil is available in a variety of flavors but the most common is sweet basil. This herb goes well with tomatoes and garlic. Add basil near the end of cooking for best flavor. Fresh basil has a stronger flavor than dried.

Cinnamon



While this spice is often what you use when making sweet baked goods, in the Mediterranean, cinnamon is also used in more savory dishes such as well poultry and rice.

Bay



In the Mediterranean, bay leaves are often used in soups, stews and sauces. Fresh leaves can be bitter, so many cooks prefer dried. Simply remove the whole leaves when you reach the desired flavor.

Coriander



Dried coriander seed is citrusy and has a slight sage or herbaceous note. Coriander is good over grilled mushrooms, in chicken stews, and with apples. It is combined with nuts and cumin in the Egyptian spice mix called dukkah.

Cardamom



This spice grows in pods and has a strong taste described as sweet. In the Middle East, the powder is used in sweet dishes as well as flavoring for coffee and tea. It is best to buy cardamom in pods and grind them as needed to preserve flavor.

Cumin



A popular ingredient in chili, this warm spice is also used in the Mediterranean. It is described as earthy and is included in spice blends, such as the Moroccan blend ras el hanout (ras-al-a-NOOT). It is also an important ingredient in hummus.

How long do spices last?

Spice manufacturers say you can keep ground spices for up to 2 to 3 years and whole spices up to 3 to 4 years. But, they can begin to lose their potency in just a few months. Store them away from heat and light. Refrigerate red spices to maintain their color and flavor longer.



Parsley

This common herb adds color and an almost citrusy taste to food. There are two types widely used: flat and curly. Flat, or Italian, parsley has a brighter and stronger flavor than curly. Parsley combines well with most soup and sauce bases.

Dill



This culinary herb is often used for the leaves, but every part of the plant is edible. It is commonly used in Mediterranean cooking and goes well with fish, pickled vegetables, light salads, creamy dressings and egg dishes. Dill is best used fresh.

Fennel Seed



Whole fennel seeds are used in Italian stews and sausages. Ground seeds are part of a popular French seasoning blend called "Herbes de Provence" (airb duh pro-VAWNS).

Oregano



This is a pungent, peppery herb used in Mediterranean cuisines, especially Greek and Italian. Often confused with marjoram, oregano is more robust and has rounder leaves.



Rosemary

This aromatic shrub is native to the Mediterranean and goes well with olive oil and garlic, as well as white beans, roasted meats and poultry.



Savory

This herb comes in both summer and winter varieties. Winter savory has a stronger flavor than summer and goes well in winter root vegetables and beans. Summer savory goes well with summer vegetables.



Thyme

Thyme is native to the Mediterranean and adds depth to soups and stews and can be used to flavor foods such as meats, roasted chicken, fish, mushrooms, onions, potatoes, tomatoes and winter vegetables.

Substituting Dried for Fresh

In general, use only 1/2 to 1/3 as much dried herb compared to fresh in a recipe. If a recipe calls for 1 tablespoon of a fresh herb, use only a teaspoon.