

Spice Sense: Flavorful Eating With Dried Herbs & Spices



What's an easy way to make healthful foods as delicious as they are nutritious? Inspiration is as close as your spice cabinet! The right herbs and spices can partner taste and nutrition by adding flavor to foods, especially those low in fat and sodium.

Consider following these important nutrition guidelines:

- ☞ Choose a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol to reduce the risk of heart disease and certain types of cancer.
- ☞ Choose a diet moderate in sodium to reduce or prevent high blood pressure.

☞ Build a basic seasoning pantry in your kitchen. Explore individual spices and herbs, experiment with simple combinations such as those listed below, then expand your seasoning "palette" to suit your personal taste preferences.

The herbs, spices, and seasonings listed below are either very low in sodium or sodium free. Thus, they are ideal for people who are on sodium-restricted diets and want to add flavor to their food:

Herbs	<i>Herbs provide color and a range of distinctive flavors.</i>	Basil, Bay Leaf, Garlic Powder, Oregano, Rosemary, Thyme
Spices	<i>Spices enhance the natural sweetness of foods and are an important part of the complex flavors of ethnic cuisines.</i>	Cinnamon, Ginger, Ground Cumin, Nutmeg
Seeds	<i>Seeds add crunchy texture and flavor to foods and make a quick, tasty garnish.</i>	Poppy Seed, Sesame Seed, Whole Cumin Seed
Peppers	<i>Peppers "warm up" foods and give them a fiery kick.</i>	Black Pepper, Cayenne Pepper, Crushed Red Pepper, Red Pepper Flakes
Seasoning Blends	<i>Perfect blends of complementary seasonings provide unique, complex flavors all in one.</i>	Chili Powder, Curry Powder

Savvy Seasoning

Start with the best

Top-quality herbs and spices are rich in volatile (essential) oils that give each seasoning its unique flavor and aroma. Dried herbs and spices are harvested at the peak of flavor and carefully sorted, dried, and packaged to preserve color, fragrance, and flavor. Sealed containers such as glass jars lock in freshness best.

Preserve quality

☞ Store herbs and spices away from light, heat, and moisture. Heat diminishes flavor, light causes the product to fade, and dampness may cause caking.

☞ Refrigerate oil-rich seeds, such as poppy and sesame seeds, to preserve freshness; also refrigerate red spices, such as chili powder, paprika, and cayenne pepper, to preserve color and flavor.

☞ Use a dry spoon to measure out the portion required. Never sprinkle seasonings directly from the jar into a steaming pot. The rising moisture may diminish the potency of the spice or herb remaining in the jar, and cause it to clump.

☞ Tightly replace caps after each use.

Test freshness

Over time, spices lose strength and color. Give your spices an annual "sniff test" by sprinkling a small amount of the spice or herb into your hand and crushing it; if a rich aroma doesn't immediately rise up to greet you, it's past its prime.

Usage tips

☞ Crumble whole dried herb leaves to release their flavor. Add them at the beginning of cooking to allow them to mellow and blend with other ingredients or, add them toward the end of cooking for a fresh, clean flavor.

☞ The flavor of ground spices is released immediately during cooking. Whole spices and bay leaves release their flavor slowly and are appropriate for long-simmering sauces, soups, and stews. Secure them in cheesecloth or a tea strainer for easy removal before serving.

☞ Toast cumin, caraway, fennel, sesame, and poppy seeds in a dry skillet before use to bring out their nutty fragrance. Toast whole or ground spices in a dry or lightly oiled skillet to deepen the flavor.

☞ As a first step in lowering your sodium intake, use garlic salt in place of regular salt to reduce the sodium content in dishes by nearly half. Salt: 2,300 mg sodium per teaspoon, Garlic Salt: 1,300 mg sodium per teaspoon.