

Spice It Up!



photo by hildgrim/flickr

Mini Fact:

People in the U.S. import and eat more spices than in any other country.

Some families are looking forward to a Thanksgiving meal with friends, family and lots of good food. But what makes our special meal so tasty?

Spices and herbs are usually a big reason that the food smells and tastes so great. This week, The Mini Page learns about the seasonings that add flavor to a traditional Thanksgiving feast.

What are spices and herbs?

A **spice** can be from the roots, seeds, fruit, flowers or bark of a plant. Spices are usually dried and ground up. Most spices are grown in tropical areas.

An **herb** (pronounced ERB) is the leafy part of a plant. Herbs may be cut up or used whole, as with bay leaves. Most herbs are grown in **temperate** climates, or where it is neither very hot nor very cold.

Favorite spices and herbs

• **Cinnamon** comes from the bark of the *Cinnamomum* tree. There are several types of this tree, and each produces a different flavor. For example, the cinnamon tree that grows in Vietnam has more than twice as much fragrant oil as other cinnamon trees. The extra oil makes it more spicy.



Raw cinnamon

photo by Bertrand Thiry

• **Vanilla** comes from the beans of an orchid vine. Vanilla grows wild in parts of Mexico and Central America. Workers dry the beans in the sun until they are dark brown. Each night for three months, they wrap the beans and take them inside, then unwrap them and take them back outside in the morning.

• **Black peppercorns** grow on *Piper nigrum* vines. Most black pepper comes from India, Indonesia, Vietnam and Brazil. Farmers climb ladders to hand-pick pepper **spikes**, or ears, full of the berries, or peppercorns.

Farmers spread the berries out so they can dry in the sun. They turn the berries several times so they dry evenly. At night, they take the berries inside to protect them from moisture, then take them back outside every morning for seven to 10 days.

• **Nutmeg** and another spice, **mace**, both come from the fruit of the same tree, *Myristica fragrans*. Mace comes from a red covering on the shell protecting the seed. The nutmeg comes from the seed itself.

Indonesia is the world's top nutmeg producer. Workers climb into the mountains to pick nutmeg fruit during many harvests a year. Afterward, the nuts are dried in the sun. The outer shell is removed, and the seeds are sorted.



Nutmeg fruit on a tree

photo by Joe Ravi

• **Oregano** comes from plants in the mint family. There are different types. Oregano is often used in pizza.

• **Sage** comes from the leaves of a shrub and is related to mint. It is grown in the U.S., Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Serbia.



Sage

Spices in history

Through much of history, spices were so important that they were used as money. About 700 to 1,000 years ago, people used black peppercorns (the source of black pepper) to pay rent, ransoms and taxes. Many of the most important voyages of exploration, including Columbus' discovery of the Americas, were undertaken partly to find different sources of spices.

Some of the most valuable spices hundreds of years ago, such as cinnamon and black pepper, are common today. Black pepper was known as the "king of spices." Many of the spices were very expensive.

Growing spices

All spices are still grown, harvested and dried by hand, much as they have been for thousands of years. Modern technology has made it much easier to grind and process spices, however. Today this work is done by machines in factories.

Resources



On the Web:

• bit.ly/MPspices

At the library:

• "A Kid's Herb Book" by Lesley Tierra

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of spices are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



CINNAMON, FEAST,
FLAVOR, FRUIT,
GRIND, HARVEST,
HERB, LEAFY, MACE,
NUTMEG, OREGANO,
PEPPER, ROOT,
SEASONING, SEEDS,
SPICE, THANKSGIVING,
TRADITIONAL,
VALUABLE, VANILLA.

S Q C I N N A M O N T S A E F
P G R I N D D G L P E P P E R
I L R O V A L F A L L I N A V
C O V O N A G E R O Y E C A M
E S T R A D I T I O N A L U C
G E M T U N J Y T S E V R A H
L E F W S E A S O N I N G T E
D D T I U R F L Y F A E L O R
G S F V A L U A B L E M D O B
G N I V I G S K N A H T R R C

Cook's Corner

Autumn Pumpkin Bread

You'll need:

- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 cup canola oil
- 3 eggs, slightly beaten
- 1 (15-ounce) can pumpkin
- 3 cups flour (whole-wheat or white)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda

- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 3/4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts (optional)



* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

What to do:

1. Beat sugar and oil using electric hand mixer. Add eggs and pumpkin; beat lightly.
2. Add all dry ingredients and mix well. Add nuts (if desired) and stir to mix.
3. Divide batter between 2 loaf pans lightly sprayed with cooking spray.
4. Bake at 350 degrees for 40 to 45 minutes until done. Let cool and serve.

1. Instruction that lists ingredients to prepare or cook food (6-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □

2. Having a very pleasing taste or smell; yummy (9-letter adjective)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

3. Round white or red vegetable with a strong smell (5-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □

4. An herb or spice added to food to make it taste better (9-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

1. Donna needs a _____ to make pumpkin pie for dessert.
2. Jimmy ate _____ apple pie with whipped cream.
3. Bonnie chopped an _____ and celery for the stuffing.
4. Olivia used pepper as a _____ on her turkey.

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Study the definition. When you know the missing word, fill in the letter boxes and the sentence blanks.

Answers: Recipe, Delicious, Onion, Seasoning.

Mini Jokes



Tom: Where can you find a lot of dancing turkeys?
Tina: At the Fowl Ball!

Eco Note



Have you heard of noise pollution? We use this phrase to describe places or times when there is too much noise. Sound is measured in units called **decibels** (DES-uh-bels). The greater the number of decibels, the louder the sound, and the more harmful it can be to your ears. If you are exposed to sound at 85 decibels and above, it may harm your hearing. These might include a garbage truck (about 100 decibels), a police siren (125) or a rocket launch (180). Take care to protect your ears from long-lasting, loud noises.

adapted from epa.gov

For later:

Look in newspaper ads for sales on spices that are used in holiday meals.

Teachers: For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bit.ly/MPstandards. And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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