

MODULE 4: PREP & COOKING II | TRANSCRIPT

LESSON 2

Spices I

The spice cabinet (or drawer) for many people is the Land of the Forgotten.

If you ever got excited about a recipe in a magazine, bought something called “garam masala,” used it once, and now the jar is coated in dust because you don’t know how else to use it, then you get what we’re talking about. You might use the cinnamon occasionally. Maybe the peppercorns. But the cardamom? The fennel seeds? The paprika? Likely ignored. Or maybe the cabinet just has tumbleweeds rolling around in it it’s so barren. Let’s change this. Spices can take dishes from bland to amazing with a few shakes.

To start, let’s go over some common spices and learn about how you can use them, and combine them. As we learned in a previous lesson, for best flavor and aroma, buy whole spices when you can and grind them fresh with a coffee or spice grinder. Or when they have some size like nutmeg and cinnamon, grate them over a microplane zester. If you don’t have a microplane zester, or a coffee or spice grinder, no problem at all—you can always buy pre-ground versions.

Spices add flavor, depth, and aroma to a dish. They’re a lot like paints: when used in the right combination, they can make a beautiful plate of food. To paint a colorful, vibrant landscape, you likely need more than one color of paint. But you don’t need to drop a boatload of money on an extensive spice collection to get started. Choose 4 or 5 that are of interest to you and use them often. Then, when you’re ready to branch out and expand your collection, buy 1 or 2 more.

The bulk section is a terrific way to try out spices and blends without committing to the entire jar. 1 tablespoon at a time is enough for 1 or two recipes—store these custom portions in small glass jars or recycled spice jars.

For the most part, spices can withstand longer cooking times than herbs and are often enhanced by dry-roasting them and adding at the beginning or early in the cooking process. They also work their best magic with a little fat or stock in the recipe mix.

Remember to reference the Ingredient Index when shopping or when you need to easily access more details about a particular ingredient. Like whole spice to ground spice equivalents...

Here are some staple spices to consider:

Allspice

Ginger-molasses cookies, mulled wine, and many other holiday recipes get their fragrant, peppery, almost clove-like aroma from these round, dried berries. They're called all-spice because their warm, spicy, and earthy-sweet flavor is reminiscent of many spices like nutmeg, cinnamon, and clove combined.

Uses: Delicious in savory dishes that incorporate seared or roasted mushrooms or lentils. Allspice adds comforting flavor to baked goods like carrot cake and gingerbread and even pots of rice. Try some on roasted vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, turnips, cabbage, beets, and winter squash. Try adding allspice to apple creations or chocolate creations like cake and pudding, and even chili, too (which is also delicious with a bit of cocoa added). A little goes a long way with allspice, so start with less and add more to taste.

Works well in combination with these spices: cardamom, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, ginger

Substitutions: nutmeg, clove, and cinnamon solo or in combination

Complimentary herbs: rosemary and thyme

Anise seeds

Not to be confused with star anise, anise seeds are potent little seeds that are sweet, fruity, warm in flavor and aroma, and licorice-like (in fact this is the flavor used to create licorice candies). Star anise has a very similar flavor, but is stronger than anise seed.

Uses: Try anise with coconut, chocolate, citrus, cranberries, fennel, apples, carrots, peaches, pumpkin, nuts, winter squash, root veggies and in recipes for bread, soup, stew, cookies, compotes, syrups, and sauces.

Works well in combination with these spices: cardamom, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, coriander, garlic, cumin, vanilla

Substitutions: ground star anise, or caraway or fennel seeds

Complimentary herbs: dill, rosemary, thyme, cilantro

Bay leaf

Technically an herb that's used a bit like a spice, when infused in liquids, these large, dried leaves add sweet, woody notes and mild, welcome bitterness to all sorts of dishes like lentil and noodle soups, winter-squash stews, even pots of rice. It's a very subtle nutmeg-menthol flavor addition that rounds out a recipe, while enhancing other warm, spicy flavors in the mix. Remove the leaf once the dish is cooked and discard or compost. Fresh bay leaves can be used when available, but note that they can be more intense in flavor than dried, so adjust if necessary.

Uses: Try bay leaf in tomato sauce, soups, stews, to enhance stocks, or to infuse pots of grains or rice. Delicious in combination with lemon and onion in a dish—try with whole food ingredients like tomatoes, mushrooms, potatoes.

Works well in combination with: allspice, garlic, cayenne, paprika, cardamom, ginger, coriander, cumin

Substitutions: for each bay leaf, start with ¼ teaspoon of dried oregano or thyme and add more to taste—use ¾–1 teaspoon fresh oregano or thyme for each bay leaf called for

Complimentary herbs: oregano, sage, thyme, marjoram, parsley, rosemary

Caraway seeds

If you've ever enjoyed a slice of rye bread, you're familiar with these somewhat licorice-flavored, tangy, sweet seeds. They also add unique flavor to fermented vegetables (sauerkrauts, pickled goods), roasted vegetables, soups, and stews. A little goes a long way—caraway seeds are fragrant and flavorful, similar to anise seeds but with some earthy notes.

Uses: Try caraway in coleslaw, potato salad, fermented veggies, stews, breads, and tomato sauces and soups. Try it with broccoli, apples, beets, mushrooms, nuts, root veggies, potatoes, and in breads.

Works well in combination with: garlic, coriander, cumin, cardamom

Substitutions: try fennel or anise seed (but less is more), nigella seeds can also work, but toast them a bit to bring out their best flavor

Complimentary herbs: cilantro, dill, oregano, parsley, thyme

Cardamom

Available in whole pods, whole seeds (from that pod), or ground, cardamom can be used in savory and sweet dishes of all kinds—desserts, stews, beverages,

rice. It's very fragrant, complex, warming, sweet, and depending on the type, slightly floral as with the Malabar variety, or woody and pine-like as with the Mysore variety. Great with carrots, fruit, peas, sweet potatoes, and winter squash.

Uses: A little goes a long way with cardamom, and you can even use it like you would bay leaf to enhance other flavors in a recipe, removing pods when cooking is finished. Whole pods are used more for savory, simmered dishes. Just give one or two a crack to open them a bit before adding to sauce, rice, or soups—this helps release the flavors. For cereals, baked goods, ice cream, beverages, puddings, and for savory applications when you don't have pods, use a bit of ground. Always start with a tiny amount (like a pinch) and add more to taste. It's easy to overwhelm a dish with cardamom. It's minty-spicy-citrus-y notes are nice in combination with cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg, cloves, and ginger. Try cardamom with apples, pears, oranges, pulses, nuts, sweet potatoes, and winter squash.

Works well in combination with these spices: cinnamon, cumin, cocoa/cacao, ginger, turmeric, black pepper, saffron, paprika, caraway, vanilla

Substitutions: equal parts cinnamon and nutmeg

Complimentary herbs: cilantro, marjoram, oregano, parsley, thyme

Cayenne pepper

A warming, sweet-spicy addition to both sweet and savory recipes, cayenne is a type of ground, dried chili pepper that's great in soups, stews, tomato sauces, even comfort foods like mac and cheese. Its slightly smoky, tart, and pungent flavor make it essential to many spice blends like Ethiopian berbere and chili powder.

Uses: Let us count the ways! A sprinkle of cayenne adds depth to myriad dishes from chocolate creations to sauces, marinades, soups, and stews, to warm cereals, to roasted veggies, to lentils, rice, and grains. It's nice added to a mug of

warm tea, and even sprinkled on juicy, sweet summer melon, pineapple, or cool cucumber. It combines well with most herbs and spices and adds balance to dishes that contain coconut milk and citrus. Cayenne is powerful stuff, so start with a very small pinch and add more to taste.

Works well in combination with these spices: cumin, paprika, cinnamon, coriander, bay leaf, cardamom, ginger, vanilla

Substitutions: for every pinch of cayenne called for, you can use 3-4 drops of hot sauce or a pinch of red chili flakes

Complimentary herbs: cilantro, marjoram, oregano, parsley, thyme, sage, rosemary

Chipotle powder

Some folks confuse chipotle powder with chili powder, but there is a difference. See, chili powder is a blend of dried chilies, paprika, cumin, maybe oregano and a few other spices, while chipotle powder is only one ingredient—dried, smoked, and ground jalapeño peppers. Chili powder has some heat to it, but chipotle powder has a deep, rich smokiness that chili powder doesn't have, and it tends to be spicier too, so a little goes a long way. This is a great seasoning to have on hand to bring meat-y depth to root veggies, lentils and mushrooms, and smoky heat to creamy sauces and dressings.

Uses: It's delicious in soups, stews, with beans and legumes, and it pairs well with mushrooms, winter and summer squash, potatoes, and nuts. Sprinkle some on cool summer melon, apples, jicama, cucumber and pineapple for a surprising treat.

Works well in combination with these spices: chili powder, cumin, cinnamon, cardamom, allspice, cayenne, fennel seeds, ginger, nutmeg, cloves

Substitutions: smoked paprika and/or add a pinch of cayenne for more heat; or chili powder with a pinch of cayenne and maybe some smoked salt or liquid smoke; or a combo of smoked paprika and chili powder; or ground ancho chili powder

Complimentary herbs: parsley, thyme, cilantro, mint, rosemary, oregano, marjoram, basil

Cinnamon

You'll find cinnamon sticks at most grocery stores, but you also may be able to find two different kinds of ground cinnamon as well: cassia cinnamon and Ceylon cinnamon. Ceylon cinnamon has a lighter color, and mildly sweet flavor while cassia cinnamon is more reddish in tone and more bitter and pungent. Cassia is the most widely available and the one you're likely familiar with, but give Ceylon a try if you can find some. It's special. As you know, cinnamon is a staple spice for baked goods and cereals, but don't underestimate its power to bring spicy-sweet bitterness, earthiness, and warmth to savory dishes of all kinds. You can grind your own whole sticks in a spice or coffee grinder or run a cinnamon stick over a microplane zester.

Uses: Try it in noodle bowls, soups, pastries, curry, cookies, muffins, ice cream, warm cereals, and sauces, or with apples and pears, bananas, carrots, citrus and oranges, grains, beans, nuts and seeds, sweet potatoes, winter and summer squash.

Works well in combination with these spices: nutmeg, ginger, allspice, cardamom, cayenne, coriander, cumin, turmeric, vanilla

Substitutions: ground allspice, or a combination of allspice, cardamom, cloves, and nutmeg

Complimentary herbs: thyme, oregano, rosemary, dill, sage

Cloves

One of the strongest spices in the cabinet, cloves are the dried buds of an evergreen tree. They're sweet, spicy, pungent, warming, earthy and delicious in soups, stews, baked goods, curry, desserts, and marinades. A little goes a very long way.

Uses: Try them with apples, beets, cabbage, carrots, chocolate, citrus fruits like orange, winter squash, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes.

Works well in combination with these spices: cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, cardamom, ginger, coriander, cayenne, vanilla

Substitutions: ground allspice, or a combination of cinnamon and nutmeg

Complimentary herbs: sage, parsley, thyme, basil

Coriander

Easy to find in both seed and ground form, this earthy, peppery, citrus-floral spice is a great addition to taco seasoning, curry, soups, sauces, and marinades. For extra flavor, try dry toasting the seeds in a skillet for a few minutes (until they smell nutty) before adding to recipes or grinding—this step brings out their best qualities.

Uses: Delicious in soups, stews, and breads, and pairs well with pome fruits like apples, bananas, citrus fruits, mushrooms, winter and summer squash, potatoes, nuts, beans and legumes.

Works well in combination with these spices: chili powder, cumin, cinnamon, cardamom, allspice, cayenne, fennel seeds, ginger, nutmeg, cloves, vanilla

Substitutions: cumin or caraway seeds

Complimentary herbs: sage, parsley, thyme, cilantro, mint, rosemary

Cumin

A smoky, earthy, deep flavor, especially when toasted, cumin comes in ground and seed form at the grocery store. Add some seeds to rice and grains when boiling, ground or seeds to stews, soups, curry, marinades, dips, and sauces. For extra flavor, try dry toasting the seeds in a skillet for a few minutes (until they smell nutty) or cooking in some oil, and then build your recipe around that. A little cumin goes a long way.

Uses: Great with avocado, lentils and beans, nuts, mushrooms, rice and grains, potatoes, winter and summer squash—try in chili, hearty stews, and sauces.

Works well in combination with these spices: garlic, turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, fennel seed, mustard seed, nutmeg, cloves, cayenne, bay leaf

Substitutions: coriander, caraway seeds, chili powder, curry powder, taco seasoning blend, or garam masala blend

Complimentary herbs: cilantro, dill, parsley, marjoram, thyme, rosemary, basil, sage

Lesson Actions

Lesson Actions for this lesson will be provided in Spices II (Spices II is simply a continuation of Spices I).