

MODULE 4: PREP & COOKING II | TRANSCRIPT

LESSON 4

Spices Blends

Now that you're familiar with the basics of the spices you'll be using every day—and we've really only scratched the surface—let's talk a bit more about how to use them with confidence, beyond a single recipe.

Remember to reference the Ingredient Index at any time for spice-pairing ideas, recipes, and more info about particular spices and blends. Spice blends make cooking easy, especially in the beginning when you are getting your bearings about how to use herbs and spices. Blends are mixed for you in tasty, foolproof ratios.

In your resources for this module, you'll find links to make your own seasoning blends at home. This isn't required at all, but DIY blends are not only great for becoming familiar with individual ingredients and how they work together, they're also great for freshness, flavor, and making sure you know exactly what's in the spice mix jar, and what isn't. (No fillers, preservatives, added sugars, lab-made flavoring, or any other junk in your DIY batch.) Making your own blends can also save you some money if you buy spices in bulk. You can buy just the amounts you need. Creating exciting spice blends requires its own course, but here are some of our favorites you can make or buy at the store to get you started.

Chili powder

Not to be confused with one-ingredient chipotle powder, chili powder is a spicy, mildly smoky blend of chilies, cumin, cayenne, coriander, garlic, and maybe oregano and chipotle powder. It's used to enhance flavor for roasted veggies, soups, stews, dark-leafy greens, dressing, dips, beans and lentils, and so much more.

Substitutions for chili powder: If you have some of the individual spices from the blend in your spice cabinet (like paprika, garlic, cumin, coriander, and onion), try a combination of those with some chipotle powder if you have some. Note that chipotle will add more “smoke” flavor to your dish.

Curry blend

Many believe this yellow spice blend (aka “curry powder”) is used to make Indian curries, but that’s not really the case. The blend was actually created by the British, since authentic Indian curries are built with separate spices or enhanced by using other blends like garam masala. The main ingredients of curry powder are turmeric (which gives it its sunshine color), cumin, and coriander, with others being black pepper, mustard, ginger, clove, cardamom, and even fenugreek which is a slightly maple-mustard scented seed. Use curry powder on roasted veggies, or to add spicy-sweet flavor to soups, stews, dressing, dips, rice and grains, dark-leafy greens, beans and lentils, and so much more.

You may have heard of “curry leaves”—they could be incorporated into a curry blend but they usually aren’t—but know that they’re an herb with a distinct flavor that’s a little sulphur-y, citrus-y, and licorice-like. Curry leaves are not a substitute for curry blend.

Substitutions for chili powder: If you have some of the individual spices from the blend in your spice cabinet (like turmeric, cumin, coriander, black pepper, and mustard), try a combination of those with any others you may have from the blend. You can also try garam masala instead, but note that it won’t have the golden color that turmeric provides, and garam masala tends to be spiced differently, with cinnamon and nutmeg giving it a slightly sweeter flavor. It’s a delicious change-up though, so give it a go.

Garam masala

This spice blend, whose name translates to “warm spice mix,” can vary quite a bit, but the main components are cloves, nutmeg, cardamom, coriander, cinnamon, black pepper, and cumin. Some blends will add turmeric, fennel seeds, ginger, garlic, mustard, fenugreek, and/or bay leaf, too. Use garam masala to season dips, sauces, dressings, and vinaigrettes. Try some in your coffee or tea. Sprinkle on popcorn, fries, or homemade veggie chips. Use some

to spice compotes and jams. Add to soups, stews, chili, and casseroles. Sprinkle on roasted veggies like carrots, sweet potatoes, dark-leafy greens, mushrooms, broccoli, cauliflower, and winter squash. And don't forget to use some when cooking up grains, rice, lentils, and chickpeas.

Substitutions for garam masala: If you have some of the individual spices from the blend in your spice cabinet (like cumin, coriander, black pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon), try a combination of those. You can also try curry powder instead, but note that it won't have the sweet, warming flavor that garam masala provides—curry is spicier and more pungent. It also adds bright golden color to your dish so keep that in mind.

Herbes de Provence

Technically a dried-summer-herb blend more than a spice blend, the ingredients in this French-inspired combination vary but usually begin with lavender, fennel seed, rosemary, savory, and thyme. Other herbs in an herbes de Provence blend include basil, tarragon, parsley, oregano, crushed or ground bay leaf, and/or mint. Some blends even include dried orange or lemon zest, but it's the lavender buds that act as the anchor making any combo of dried herbs qualify as herbes de Provence.

Try some in crackers, breads, dips, sauces, vinaigrettes, roasted veggies, soups, stews. Delicious with almost all vegetables, especially potatoes, root veggies, winter squash, dark-leafy greens, cooked beans, grains, rice, green beans, peas, tomatoes, mushrooms.... We could go on and on.

Substitutions for herbes de Provence: If you have some of the individual dried or fresh herbs from the blend in your fridge or spice cabinet (like lavender, fennel seed, thyme, and savory), try a combination of those.

Jerk seasoning

Available in both paste and powder form, authentic jerk spice blend is anchored by Scotch bonnet peppers, which are a four-alarm spicy pepper from the Caribbean that when dried and mixed with onion or scallion, garlic, thyme, ginger, parsley, allspice, black pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg make up true jerk seasoning, aka “Jamaican jerk seasoning.” This is an incredibly spicy blend that adds unique flavor to roasted veggies, sauces, dark-leafy greens, dressings, grains, rice, beans, legumes. Use it to season scrambles, guacamole, dips, soups, stews, casseroles, even fries.

Substitutions for jerk seasoning: If you can’t get your hands on dried or ground Scotch bonnets, you can still make a version just fine at home. Use cayenne to bring the heat instead and combine with some of the individual dried or fresh ingredients from the blend in your pantry or spice cabinet (like onion, garlic, ginger, thyme, black pepper, and cinnamon). If using fresh ingredients, blend or use a mortar and pestle to mash everything together into a paste.

Montreal steak seasoning

This spicy, herby, and onion-y seasoning blend can be used for so much more than steak. Its core ingredients are garlic, coriander, black pepper, dill seed, and salt, but other ingredients can also include rosemary, thyme, crushed red pepper, and mustard seeds. Try it on roasted veggies, in sauces, with dark-leafy greens, dressings, grains, rice, beans, and legumes. Use it to season scrambles, dips, soups, stews, casseroles, even fries.

Substitutions for Montreal steak seasoning: If you have some of the individual dried or fresh ingredients from the blend in your pantry or spice cabinet (like red pepper flakes, onion, garlic, rosemary, thyme, black pepper, and coriander), try a combination of those. If using fresh ingredients, blend or use a mortar and pestle to mash everything together into a paste.

Poultry blend

While most commonly used to season poultry, this staple blend of herbs and spices can be used to enhance flavor for soups, roasted veggies, dips, dressings, sauces, stuffing, and much more. The ingredients in this combination usually contain sage, thyme, marjoram, rosemary, nutmeg, and black pepper, but some versions include ginger, paprika, celery seed or fennel seed as well.

Try some in crackers, breads, vinaigrettes, and stews. Delicious with almost all vegetables, especially potatoes, dark-leafy greens, root veggies, winter squash, cooked beans, grains, rice, green beans, peas, tomatoes, and mushrooms.

Substitutions for poultry seasoning: If you have some of the individual dried or fresh ingredients from the blend (like sage, thyme, marjoram, and rosemary) try a combination of those, and if using fresh ingredients, blend or use a mortar and pestle to mash everything together into a paste.

Taco seasoning

This spicy, mildly smoky combo of chili powder (the blend), cumin, garlic, onion, and (depending on the mix) maybe coriander, red pepper flakes, paprika, oregano, and dried cilantro, or lime zest, can of course, be used to season roasted veggies, grains, rice, legumes, and mushrooms for tacos, but you can use it for so much more. It enhances the flavor for soups, stews, chili, dark-leafy greens, dressing, dips, and on and on. Use some to spice up guacamole, or to season noodles, a casserole, or rice. Sprinkle some on fries or pizza. And, spice up skillet breads and crispy snacks like roasted chickpeas and lentils.

Substitutions for taco seasoning: If you have some of the individual spices from the blend in your spice cabinet (like chili powder, cumin, and coriander), try a combination of those.

Using spice blends

We've discussed specific cooking ideas for each spice blend, but here are a few more general thoughts to help you feel confident about using them often.

Roasted veggies: If cooking from a recipe, simply toss veggies in cooking oil or broth, sprinkle with a spice blend and then roast at the temp and time specified. If you want to wing it, set the oven to 350°F–375°F and toss veggies in cooking oil or broth. Pop in the oven and check on your veggies every 10 minutes, giving the pan a stir or shake each time until the edges and exteriors are crispy and brown and easily pierced with a fork, but not mushy.

Dense veggies like beets can take 40–50 minutes to roast, while softer veggies like broccoli can take 15–20. Remember, the smaller and more uniform the chop of the veggies, the quicker the cook time. Also note that oil will provide crispiness and browning, while broth will simply steam and soften the veggies without giving them crispy edges.

If your spice blend contains herbs, and the roasting will be longer than 20 minutes or at a higher temp than 375°F, add the blend at the halfway point of roasting time to prevent the herbs and spices from burning or start roasting your veggies and then add your spice blend during the last 10 minutes of roasting time to err on the side of caution. Stirring veggies halfway through the cook time can also prevent burning as it will redistribute the oil or stock and keep the spices and/or herbs in the blend moisturized.

Try this a few different ways and write down in your cooking journal what worked and what you'll do differently next time, since roasting veggies will become a go-to technique for your good food cooking routine.

You can also shake a seasoning blend over roasted veggies right after they come out of the oven.

Use these seasoned, roasted veggies to fill tacos and wraps, serve with an egg or animal protein of choice, allow them to cool and add to a hearty salad (you don't want the heat to wilt tender leaves), serve them over rice or cooked grains, or toss with cooked pulses like lentils and chickpeas. You can make them in advance and keep them in the fridge for all sorts of quick meals throughout the week.

Dressings and vinaigrettes: Add a pinch or five of a spice blend to a vinaigrette or dressing for easy flavor.

Use for salads, yes, but you can also drizzle these dressings and vinaigrettes on tacos and wraps, into skillet bread batter before baking, over cooked grains and rice, or lentils, beans, and chickpeas, too.

Rice and grains: Add 1–3 teaspoons or more of spice blend (to taste) to a pot of cooking rice or grains. For best flavor, first toast the rice or grains—along with the spices—in some oil until everything becomes fragrant and nutty, then add water or stock to boil and cook.

Sauces, yogurt, dip: Start with a plain yogurt (dairy or non-dairy) and stir in a spice blend to taste. This sauce can top tacos, wraps, bowls, scrambles, or dress a salad, top roasted veggies, be folded with pasta, rice, grains, or be served with cooked lentils and chickpeas. It also makes a great dip for fries, endive, or crudités.

This also works if you start with a simple cashew cream sauce—change its flavor with 1–4 teaspoons of spice. Try some spices and spice blends in your hummus, too. Game-changer.

Soups and stews: Build up a soup or stew with aromatics (more on that soon), some stock and then add spice blend to taste to add depth to the flavor profile. The same soup base of root veggies, celery, onion and stock can take on a Mexican, Italian, Indian, French, or Ethiopian flavor simply by adding the right spice blend. As a guideline, always start with less and add more to taste.

Snacks: Take popcorn, homemade chips, fries, and even crispy roasted lentils and chickpeas to the next level simply by sprinkling them with spices.

Lesson Actions

If you don't have any of these blends, choose two and add them to your spice cabinet this week.

Then, choose a favorite simple recipe like rice, cooked beans, and/or roasted veggies and prepare them unseasoned. Divide the cooked rice, beans, and/or veggies in half and season one half with one of the two blends and the other half with the second blend.

Document your thoughts and findings in your journal and share with others if you like. If you have more than two blends, by all means divide up the simple ingredients to accommodate more experiments with flavor.

(And, bonus, this exercise lets you do twice the weekly meal prep in the same amount of time!)