



The Seven Super Spices



Cinnamon

You may adore the warm, distinctive flavour that Cinnamon adds to sweet and savoury dishes. But there's much more to this fragrant spice than you ever imagined. Did you know that this ancient spice is an antioxidant powerhouse?

Description: Cinnamon is the dried inner bark of various evergreen trees belonging to the genus *Cinnamomum*. At harvest, the bark is stripped off and put in the sun, where it curls into the familiar form called "quills."

Did You Know?: The best Cinnamon grows within sight of the sea in a sub-tropical climate. Before the source of spices was discovered by Europeans, the Arabs maintained their monopoly of the spice trade by claiming that Cinnamon was harvested from the nests of ferocious birds and had to be gathered under their attack. Egyptians imported it from China in 2000 BC. Romans believed Cinnamon was sacred, and Nero burned a year's supply of the spice at the funeral for his wife. Finding Cinnamon was a primary motive of world exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries. It was also used in embalming, where body cavities were filled with spiced preservatives. In the ancient world Cinnamon was more precious than gold.

Origins: *Cinnamomum burmannii* is primarily imported from Indonesia and this is where we buy our Cinnamon. Vietnam has become the source for *Cinnamomum loureirii*, referred to as Saigon Cinnamon, and considered the finest Cinnamon available. *Cinnamomum zeylanicum*, grown in Sri Lanka, is actually "true Cinnamon" but is not widely used due to its unique flavour. Cinnamon has been popular since ancient times.

Usage: The sweet-spicy flavour of Cinnamon enhances the taste of vegetables and fruits. Cinnamon is a perfect partner for chocolate; use it in any chocolate dessert or drink. It is used to mellow the tartness of apple pie. Ground Cinnamon should not be added to boiling liquids; the liquid may become stringy and the Cinnamon will lose flavour. Cinnamon is also an essential ingredient in Moroccan tagines or lamb stew. And for a fragrant pilaf, cook rice in Cinnamon flavoured broth and stir in chopped dried fruit and toasted nuts.

Sensory Profile: Cinnamon is characteristically woody, musty and earthy in flavour and aroma. It is warming to taste. The finer the grind, the more quickly the Cinnamon is perceived by the taste buds.





Ginger

Ginger is a tropical spice that has a wonderful pungent, citrus flavour that many of us associate with holiday baking. Derived from the gingerroot, this holiday favourite is special for other reasons too. You may be comforted by the soothing smells of Ginger-spiked baked goods, yet you may not know that Ginger has a long history of other comforting properties. For centuries, Ginger was used as a natural remedy for a variety of conditions, especially soothing distressed stomachs.

Description: Ginger is the dried knobby shaped root of the perennial herb *Zingiber officinale*. The plant grows two to three feet tall. Once the leaves of the plant die, the thick roots, about 6 inches long, are dug up. Crystallised Ginger is fresh gingerroot cooked in syrup and dried.

Did You Know?: Ginger is a warming spice said to promote sweating and relieve colds. A teaspoon of Ginger in warm water is said to guard against travel sickness. Ginger is believed to be an aid to digestion and to help stimulate the circulation. Ginger was introduced to England before 1066 and was used mainly as a baking spice. Elizabeth I had a fancy for gingerbread which her cook made into the likeness of her courtiers, the prototype for our traditional gingerbread man. During the 15th century, gingerbread became a gift of love and respect. In the 1800's, Ginger was commonly sprinkled on top of beer or ale, then stirred into the drink with a hot poker - thus the invention of ginger ale.

Origins: China and India are the principal sources of Ginger. We buy our Ginger from India.

Usage: Ginger is one of the warming spices - hence its use with melon to balance a cold food. Morocco's intriguing spice mix, ras-el-hanout, contains a wide range of spices, amongst them dried Ginger. It is used in traditional tagines, couscous and in almond and honey desserts. Sweet potatoes and carrots are delicious sprinkled with Ground Ginger. Ginger is also often used in Indian curry powders or add Ground Ginger to fruit crumble toppings.

Sensory Profile: The flavour of Ginger is characterised by its unique combination of lemon/citrus, soapy and musty/earthy flavour tones. It is warming to taste.



Oregano

Of all the dried herbs, Oregano has one of the highest antioxidant levels. Rosmarinic acid is the active compound in oregano that appears to have the strong antioxidant activity.

Description: Oregano is the dried leaves of the herbs *Origanum* spp or *Lippia* spp (Mexican). Both varieties have traditionally been harvested in the "wild." The Mediterranean variety is closely related to Marjoram and is very similar in physical appearance.

Did You Know?: The word "Oregano" is Greek, derived and translated means "Joy of the Mountain". Oregano was popular in ancient Egypt and Greece as a flavouring for vegetables, wines, meats and fish.

Origins: Turkey is the principal supplier of Oregano to McCORMICK. It is stronger flavoured and more bitter than the Greek variety. The Mexican type has a distinctively different flavour that is less minty, more hay-like and less bitter than the other sources.

Usage: Marinate and baste lamb or chicken with a dressing of olive oil, lemon juice, salt and Oregano. Grill or barbecue and serve with wedges of lemon.

Sensory Profile: Oregano is generally described as possessing a strongly aromatic, camphoraceous aroma and a slightly bitter, pungent flavour. This pungent flavour is composed of earthy/musty, green, hay and minty notes. The spice imparts a slightly astringent mouthfeel.





Paprika

Turning up the heat in your cooking can help you crank up the antioxidants. Capsaicin is the powerful compound in Paprika that gives chillies their heat. The hotter the Paprika, the more capsaicin (and antioxidants!) you'll find.

Description: Paprika is the dried, ground pods of *Capsicum annum*, a sweet red pepper. It is mildly flavoured and prized for its brilliant red colour.

Did You Know?: Paprika was introduced to Hungary by the conquering Turks in 1699. Paprika is a rich source of Vitamin C.

Early Spanish explorers took red pepper seeds back to Europe, where the plant gradually lost its pungent taste and became "sweet" Paprika. A Hungarian scientist won the Nobel Prize for research on the vitamin content of Paprika.

Origins: Paprika is primarily produced in Spain, Central Europe, and the United States. Although both Spanish and Hungarian Paprika are mild and sweet in flavour, several important differences exist. Hungarian Paprika is characteristically fresh, green and vegetable-like, while the Spanish Paprika exhibits a more fermented and piquant flavour. Historically, the Central European varieties were more pungent, but they now exhibit a sweetness similar to Spanish Paprika. We buy our Paprika from America or Spain.

Usage: Paprika is the national spice of Hungary and a typical goulash makes an excellent warming winter stew. Paprika also goes well in chicken casseroles and stroganoff. Paprika makes a colourful garnish for mayonnaise, white sauces and creamy soups. Give Swiss rosti an appetising colour by tossing the grated potato in Paprika before frying.

Sensory Profile: Most Paprika is mild and slightly sweet in flavour with a pleasantly fragrant aroma.





Rosemary

A cornerstone of Mediterranean cooking, this distinctive, aromatic herb is packed with flavour and antioxidants.

Description: Rosemary is the dried leaves of the evergreen *Rosmarinus officinalis*. The slender, slightly curved leaves resemble miniature curved pine needles. Normally hand harvested, the Rosemary plant grows about two to three feet tall and is very hardy as it grows under harsh mountainous conditions.

Did You Know?: The Latin name 'Ros Maris' means 'Dew of the Sea', as the plant grows well by the seaside. Legend has it that the Virgin Mary, fleeing from Herod's soldiers, hung her cloak on a Rosemary bush one night. In the morning the white flowers had turned blue under her cloak. From then on, the herb became known as 'Rose of Mary'. In ancient Greece it was believed that Rosemary fortified the brain and refreshed the memory. Students wore it in their hair during examinations to improve their memory. Associated with remembrance, Rosemary was used at weddings and funerals. Rosemary is believed to grow well in the garden of a happy household. For a refreshing bath add a handful of Rosemary, tied in muslin, to the water. An infusion of Rosemary is said to be calming on the nerves. Rosemary is an antiseptic and works well as a breath freshener.

Origins: The major producers of Rosemary are France and Spain/Portugal.

Usage: Rosemary adds flavour to fruit salads and jellies. Sprinkle Rosemary over barbecue coals for an aromatic smoky flavour. Rosemary makes a fresh and flavoursome marinade for meats and oily fish together with olive oil, garlic and lemon juice. For duck and other game, serve a rich red wine and orange gravy flavoured with Rosemary. Rosemary is traditionally used with lamb but also goes well with pork. Its fresh, camphor-like aroma is a good counter-balance to rich or fatty foods.

Sensory Profile: Rosemary has a distinctive pine-woody aroma with camphoraceous undertones and a fresh, bittersweet flavour.

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Thyme

Thyme contains a variety of beneficial compounds called flavonoids that increase the herb's antioxidant capacity.

Description: Thyme is the dried leaves of *Thymus vulgaris*, a small perennial of the mint family. The leaves measure about one quarter of an inch in length and one tenth of an inch in width. The plant grows about 18 inches tall and produces small flowers that are very attractive to honey bees

Did You Know?: Thyme dates back to ancient Greece, where it symbolised courage. Roman soldiers bathed in water infused with Thyme to gain vigour, courage and strength. In the Middle Ages, ladies embroidered a sprig of Thyme on the scarves of knights for bravery.

Origins: Most Thyme is imported from Spain.

Usage: Thyme's aromatic flavour adds warmth and pungency to a very wide variety of dishes such as stuffings, marinades, vegetables, fish and cheese. It is an essential flavouring in many classic dishes for meat, game and poultry. Traditional British dishes are often flavoured with Thyme, especially those with fatty cuts of meat or rich game. Add Thyme to Irish stew, faggots, liver and onions, oxtail, boiled bacon, steak and kidney and Lancashire hotpot. The strong fresh flavour of Thyme blends well with other herbs without overpowering them. It is one of the ingredients in Bouquet Garni.

Sensory Profile: Thyme is characterised by minty-green, hay-like, and musty flavour notes.

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Turmeric

Turmeric is a deeply-hued spice found in yellow curry powder that provides much more than colour and flavour. It is a concentrated source of antioxidants.

Description: Turmeric is the dried root of the plant *Curcuma longa*. Noted for its bright yellow colour, it is related to and similar in size to Ginger. Turmeric's flavour resembles a combination of ginger and pepper.

Did You Know?: Turmeric was used for centuries as a colouring agent, often being substituted for the more expensive Saffron, hence its medieval name 'Indian Saffron'. In Asia it is believed to be a tonic and a remedy for liver problems. In Indonesia rice dyed with Turmeric is traditionally part of the wedding ritual. Turmeric is also used to colour the arms of the bride and groom and to give a golden flush to the cheeks. Today in the West it is used to colour cheese, pickles and mustards.

Origins: India (Alleppey Turmeric) is the primary exporter, although Peru and China are additional sources. Alleppey Turmeric is highly regarded for its deep yellow to orange-yellow colour. Chinese Turmeric, which is of comparable quality to Alleppey, is characteristically more brownish in colour.

Usage: Sprinkled into the cooking water for rice, together with Whole Cloves, a Cinnamon Stick and Cardamom Pods, Turmeric gives rice a beautiful golden colour. Seafood sauces can be enhanced with Turmeric or try a caper sauce for fish with Turmeric, Parsley, Allspice, Bay Leaves, Cloves, cream and capers flavouring a basic béchamel sauce. Use Turmeric wherever a dish will be enhanced by a brighter yellow colouring such as eggs, relishes, mustard or cream sauces, soups and flavoured butter.

Sensory Profile: Turmeric has a characteristic musky, earthy aroma and a pungent, slightly bitter flavour.

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