



HOW TO USE SPICES IN YOUR CUPBOARD (WITHOUT A RECIPE)

once upon a chef

WITH JENN SEGAL

One of the most common questions I get asked is, “*How do I use the spices in my cupboard when I’m not following a recipe?*” It’s true: spices add flavor, color, aroma, and depth to recipes but sometimes it’s hard to know what to add.

Knowing how to use your spice rack will not only elevate your cooking, but it will also make you feel more confident in the kitchen, allow you to be more creative and, most importantly, keep you from cooking a meal lacking flavor.







The following spice cheat sheet describes the flavor of the most commonly used kitchen spices, as well as the spices frequently used in different regions around the world. With this basic info in your back pocket, you should feel free to play with spices in your cupboard while you cook — just sprinkle them in little by little, until the dish tastes good to you.

One final tip: if you’ve seasoned a dish generously with spices and it still tastes bland, you probably need more salt.

SPICES BY FLAVOR

ALLSPICE	<p>Slightly peppery, warm, flavors similar to cloves. Commonly used in baking, Caribbean, and German cuisines.</p> <p> Pumpkin Pancakes</p> <p> Jerk Chicken</p>
ANCHO CHILI POWDER	<p>Warm, moderately spicy, raisin-y flavors. Commonly used in Tex-Mex cuisine.</p> <p> Ground Beef Chili</p>
BASIL	<p>Minty, licorice, clove-like flavors. Commonly used in Italian cuisine. <i>Fresh basil is always recommended.</i></p>
BAY LEAVES	<p>Woodsy, slightly bitter flavor. Commonly used in Latin American and Mediterranean cuisines, especially stews and soups. Always remove and discard bay leaves before serving.</p> <p> Beef Stew</p> <p> Beef Tzimmes</p>
CARAWAY SEEDS	<p>Licorice, nutty, bitter-sweet flavors. Commonly used in German, Austrian, Eastern Europe and Scandinavian cuisines. It is also used to flavor sausages.</p> <p> Irish Soda Bread Muffins</p>
CARDAMOM	<p>Lemony, earthy, sweet, hints of mint flavors. Commonly used in Indian, Middle Eastern, and Scandinavian cuisines. Available in seed and ground forms.</p> <p> Chai Spiced Banana Bread</p>
CAYENNE PEPPER	<p>Spicy, smoky, hot flavors. Commonly used in Southwestern and Mexican cuisines.</p> <p> White Chicken Chili</p> <p> Sweet, Spicy, Salty Candied Pecans</p>

CHILI POWDER	<p>Earthy, warm, mild to moderately spicy flavors. Blend of spices including ground chiles, paprika, cumin, garlic, and salt. Commonly used in Tex-Mex cuisine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍴 Chicken Tortilla Soup 🍴 Carne Asada
CHINESE FIVE SPICE POWDER	<p>Warm, sweet, aromatic, licorice flavors. Blend of spices including fennel, cinnamon, cloves, star anise, Szechuan peppercorns. Commonly used in Chinese cuisine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍴 Char Siu Chicken
CHIPOTLE CHILI POWDER	<p>Smoky, spicy flavors. Commonly used in Tex-Mex cuisine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍴 Ground Beef Chili
CINNAMON	<p>Deep, warm, sweet, aromatic flavors. Commonly used in baking, Middle Eastern, Moroccan, and Indian cuisines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍴 Rustic French Apple Tart 🍴 Middle Eastern Lamb Kofta
CLOVES	<p>Sweet, pungent, aromatic flavors. Commonly used in baking, Caribbean, and Indian cuisines. Available whole and ground.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍴 Pumpkin Bread
CORIANDER	<p>Citrusy, mellow, earthy flavors. Commonly used in Indian and Mexican cuisines. Available in seed and ground form.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍴 Chicken Tikka Masala 🍴 Chicken & Quinoa Burrito Bowls with Spicy Green Sauce
CUMIN	<p>Smoky, sweet, earthy, pungent flavors. Commonly used in Southwestern, Mexican, North African, Middle Eastern, and Indian cuisines. Available in seed and ground form.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍴 Middle Eastern Chicken Kebabs 🍴 Roasted Tomato Salsa

CURRY	<p>Savory, earthy, warm, sweet flavors. Blend of cumin, turmeric, red pepper, coriander, cloves. Commonly used in Indian and Middle Eastern cuisines.</p> <p> Chicken Curry</p>
DILL	<p>Aromatic, bitter, citrusy flavors. Commonly used in Middle Eastern and European cuisines. Fresh dill is often used in recipes.</p> <p> Buttermilk Ranch Dressing</p> <p> Refrigerator Pickles</p>
GARAM MASALA	<p>Warm, sweet, aromatic, floral flavors. Blend of coriander, black pepper, cumin, cardamom, and cinnamon. Commonly used in Indian cuisines.</p> <p> Indian Spiced Red Lentil & Chicken Soup</p>
GARLIC POWDER	<p>Zesty, warm, pungent flavors. Used in a wide variety of cuisines.</p> <p> Buttermilk Fried Chicken Tenders</p>
GROUND GINGER	<p>Woodsy, peppery, warm, sweet flavors. Commonly used in baking, Asian, Indian, and Caribbean cuisines.</p> <p> Old-Fashioned Ginger Spice Cookies</p> <p> Asian Kale Salad with Ginger Peanut Dressing</p>
NUTMEG	<p>Warm, earthy, nutty, sweet flavors. Used in a wide variety of cuisines; including savory (meat-based, roasted vegetable) dishes and sweets (like muffins, cakes, and cookies).</p> <p> Spinach Quiche</p> <p> Zucchini Muffins with Chocolate Chips</p>
OREGANO	<p>Peppery, bitter, warm, sharp flavors. Commonly used in Italian and Mediterranean cuisine.</p> <p> Greek Shrimp with Tomatoes and Feta</p>

PAPRIKA (SWEET/HUNGARIAN)	<p>Sweet, aromatic, spicy flavors. Commonly used in Spanish, South American, and Hungarian cuisines.</p> <p> Southwestern Maple Glazed Salmon with Pineapple Salsa</p>
PAPRIKA (SMOKED/SPANISH)	<p>(Also called pimento and smoked pimenton.) Warm, smoky flavors. Commonly used in Spanish and South American cuisines.</p> <p> Chicken Enchiladas with Tomatillo Sauce</p>
PARSLEY	<p>Bitter, bright flavors. Commonly used in Italian and Middle Eastern cuisines. <i>Fresh parsley is always recommended.</i></p>
ROSEMARY	<p>Woodsy, peppery, pungent flavors. Commonly used in Italian and Middle Eastern cuisines. <i>Fresh rosemary is always recommended.</i></p>
SAFFRON	<p>Floral, earthy flavors. Commonly used in Indian, Spanish, and Mediterranean cuisines (very common in paella and bouillabaisse). Available as threads or ground. Use it very sparingly (just a pinch), as it can taste medicinal.</p>
SAGE	<p>Fragrant, faintly bitter, pine-like flavors. Used in various cuisines (common in meat, stuffing, potato, and bean dishes). Available as whole leaves, rubbed (leaves are crumbled), or ground.</p>
THYME	<p>Fragrant, lemony, earthy, peppery flavors. Commonly used in Mediterranean and French cuisines.</p> <p> Beef Stew</p> <p> Roasted Carrots</p>
TURMERIC	<p>Earthy, citrusy, slightly bitter flavors. Commonly used in Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, and Indian cuisines.</p> <p> Golden Gazpacho</p>

SPICES BY CUISINE

AFRICAN	allspice, cardamom, chile peppers, cloves, cinnamon, cumin, fenugreek, garlic, mint, paprika, parsley, ras el hanout
CARIBBEAN	allspice, ginger, chile peppers, cilantro, cinnamon, cloves, curry, garlic, nutmeg, paprika, parsley
CHINESE	cinnamon, cloves, chile peppers, five spice powder, garlic, ginger, sesame seeds
FRENCH	basil, garlic, herbes de Provence, marjoram, nutmeg, sage, tarragon, thyme, parsley, sage
GREEK	anise, basil, bay leaf, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, dill, fennel, garlic, ginger, marjoram, mint, nutmeg, oregano, parsley, thyme
INDIAN	allspice, anise, cardamom, chile peppers, cilantro, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, curry, fenugreek, garam masala, ginger, mint, nutmeg, paprika, saffron, turmeric
INDONESIAN	bay leaves, candlenut, cinnamon, cumin, galangal, ginger, kafir lime leaves, kluwak, salam leaves, tamarind
ITALIAN	basil, fennel, garlic, oregano, parsley, red pepper flakes, rosemary, sage, thyme
KOREAN	chile peppers, garlic, ginger, sesame seeds
LATIN AMERICAN	anise, chile peppers, cilantro, cinnamon, oregano, rosemary, star anise, thyme
MEXICAN	allspice, chile peppers, chili powder, coriander, cilantro, cinnamon, cumin, garlic, oregano

MIDDLE EASTERN	bay leaves, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, dill, garlic, mint, nutmeg, oregano, parsley
NORTH AFRICAN	allspice, berbere, caraway, cardamom, chili, cloves, garlic ginger, nutmeg, paprika, ras el hanout, tabil
THAI	basil, chile peppers, cilantro, cumin, curry, garlic, ginger, mint, turmeric
VIETNAMESE	chile peppers, cilantro, garlic, galangal, ginger, lemongrass, mint, star anise, basil