

HERBS, SPICES, CONDIMENTS AND FLAVOURANTS

12

In this chapter you will learn to...

Demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of herbs, spices, condiments and flavourants:

- The difference between herbs and spices
- Different kinds of herbs and spices
- Principles of using herbs and spices
- Flavourants
- Condiments
- Vinegars
- Oils

1

Introduction



It is the chef's role to present well-flavoured food that can be enhanced by simply sprinkling salt or a more complicated combination of flavourings on the food.

Herbs and spices are commonly used in foods around the world. They are primarily used to add flavour and aroma to food and to give dishes a distinctive taste. Herbs and spices are obtained from plants. Herbs and spices are also used for their medicinal value and for detoxification.

2

Flavourants



A flavourant is an item that adds a new taste to food and alters its natural flavours. Flavour is the sensory impression of food and is determined by taste and smell. The flavour of food can be changed by natural or artificial flavourants. It can alter or enhance the flavour of natural food, such as chicken flavoured with lemon.

2.1 Difference between herbs and spices

The most important difference between herbs and spices is the part of the plant from which it is obtained. **Herbs** are the fragrant leaves of non-woody plants. Their flavour comes from the oil stored in the leaves, which is released when the herb is chopped, crushed or heated. Herbs can be used fresh or dried, but are more fragrant when fresh. They can be used in cooking, and are used in larger amounts than spices. Herbs are grown all over the world.

Spices are the roots, bark, stems, flowers, fruit or seeds of woody or non-woody plants. Spices are usually stronger flavoured and more potent than herbs, therefore spices are used in smaller quantities. Spices are almost always used in their dry form, either whole or ground. Dried powders are the strongest in flavour. Spices are more commonly found in the Far East and in tropical countries.

Some plants are both herbs and spices. Coriander leaves (cilantro) and seeds (coriander spice) can be used.

2.2 Different kinds of herbs

HERB	DESCRIPTION AND FLAVOUR	USE	ORIGIN
<p>Basil</p> 	<p>Sweet basil is sweet with a clove-like spiciness. Purple basil has a peppery taste.</p>	<p>Pestos, with tomatoes, tomato-flavoured dishes and pasta sauces, pizzas, Mediterranean (Italian) dishes, flavoured oils.</p>	<p>Ancient Egypt, India, Persia.</p>
<p>Bay leaves</p> 	<p>Fragrant tree leaves, slightly sweet taste. Fresh leaves taste like balsam and honey. They have a sharp taste, spicy and aromatic.</p>	<p>Fresh and dried leaves. Marinades, stock, pâtés, stews, curries and stuffings, pickling; bouquet garni.</p>	<p>Mediterranean, Turkey.</p>
<p>Chives</p> 	<p>Seasonal, onion-like green leaves that resemble a hollow green stick. Mauve pink flowers in summer. Loses flavour with drying.</p>	<p>Salads, soups, sauces, dips, soft cheeses, pastas, sauces, omelettes and as a garnish.</p>	<p>Europe, Britain.</p>
<p>Coriander/cilantro/dhania</p> 	<p>Available all year. Aromatic leaves with a sweet scent. Stem can be used as well.</p>	<p>Curries, pickles, stir-fries, meat dishes, salads, sauces and as a garnish.</p>	<p>Ancient Egypt, Southern Europe.</p>
<p>Dill</p> 	<p>Available all year. Feather leaves with a unique spicy anise and citrus taste.</p>	<p>Fish, eggs, potatoes, pickles, salads, soups, cream cheese and as a garnish.</p>	<p>Mediterranean, Russia, Black Sea.</p>
<p>Fennel</p> 	<p>Available all year. It has feathery leaves. Smells like liquorice. Similar to anise seed.</p>	<p>Green beans, salads, fish, chicken stuffing, cream cheese. Fry/bake fennel bulbs.</p>	<p>Mediterranean, Southern Europe.</p>

HERB	DESCRIPTION AND FLAVOUR	USE	ORIGIN
Sage 	Evergreen shrub. Long, narrow, greyish leaves with a musty, smoky aroma.	Rich fatty meats, pork, cheese, pickles, savoury bread, flavour butter for pasta, deep fry leaves as a garnish.	Mediterranean.
Thyme 	Thin, greyish green leaves with an aromatic, pungent taste. Use with stem for the most taste.	Potjiekos, casseroles, marinades, sauces, part of bouquet garni.	Mediterranean.

Important words

Fines herbes: A traditional French herb blend, finely chopped, that consists of parsley, chervil, chives and tarragon. It may be used with eggs, poached fish and chicken, sauces and steamed vegetables.

2.3 Different kinds of spices

SPICES	DESCRIPTION AND FLAVOUR	USE	ORIGIN
All spice / Jamaican pepper	Tastes like a mixture of nutmeg, cinnamon and clove. It is dark-brown, pea-size berries from the pimento tree that are ground.	Pickled fish, stews and casseroles, relishes and chutneys. Can be used in sweet and savoury dishes.	Jamaica, Southern Mexico.
Anise seed 	A small greenish-gray seed . Hint of mild liquorice.	Cakes, baking, flavour alcoholic drinks, spicy cakes.	Egypt.
Cardamom 	Warm, slightly piquant, lemony, eucalyptus flavour. You can buy the powder, dried Pods or loose seeds .	Curries, savoury rice dishes, coffee, pastries, buns, ice cream.	India.
Chillies 	Hot and fierce. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chilli powder is made from the dried, ground seeds which are the hottest part of the chilli. There are different varieties of chilli powder that differ in heat and strength of flavour. 	Asian and Chinese food, curries, sambals, tacos, sauces, harissa paste.	Central America, Southern America.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cayenne pepper has a warm, red-orange colour. Looks like a thin, pointed chilli, but it is not as hot as chillies. It is made from the seeds of the plant. 	Fish, shellfish, boiled eggs, cheese sauce.	Cayenne district of French Guiana.

SPICES	DESCRIPTION AND FLAVOUR	USE	ORIGIN
Pepper 	Pepper is ground peppercorns (berries). Whole peppercorns have a true peppery taste – pungent, with a woody aroma and hot, biting taste. Pepper is the most used spiced in Western cooking. It has a hot, strong sharp flavour. White pepper is the mildest.	White pepper blends better with food and sauces, while black pepper stands out because of its colour.	Tropical India.
Saffron 	Most expensive spice with a pungent, honey-like flavour and a brilliant orange colour. It is made from dried stigmas of the saffron crocus flower.	Rice dishes, sauces, soups, puddings and sweets.	Southern Europe, South Western Asia.
Star anise 	It is a star-shaped fruit that has a sharp, aniseed flavour.	Chinese food, stews, soups.	China, Vietnam.
Turmeric 	Warm, slightly acrid flavour. It is made from the root of a ginger-like plant. The plant has a yellow rind and is orange on the inside.	Seasoning and colouring of curries, bobotie, sauces, pickles and chutney.	India, Southern Asia.
Vanilla 	Vanilla has a sweet flavour and aroma. It is a flavouring that is extracted from the seed pods (bean pod) of an orchid. Vanilla orchids are grown in tropical climates, namely Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico, Central and South America and the West Indies. Vanilla is sold as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a whole pod • powder • paste • extract • essence. 	Desserts, cakes, sweets, ice cream, yoghurt, milk, custards and sauces.	Mexico.

Classroom activity 1

- (1) Find out which is the most expensive spice and explain why.
- (2) What is wasabi?



6.1 Olive oil

Olive oil is a product of the Mediterranean. It is made from the olive fruit of an olive tree. There are different kinds of olive oil. The name of the oil indicates the degree of processing, as well as the quality for the oil, e.g. extra-virgin olive oil, virgin olive oil and pure olive oil. Extra-virgin olive oil is the highest grade available and only cold pressed once, followed by virgin olive oil.

Extra-virgin olive oil may be used in salads and salad dressings, for sautéing vegetables, for stews and soups, and as a dipping for bread.

Important words

Cold pressed: Also known as cold extraction. The oil is not heated during processing, and retains all the aroma, natural antioxidants and minerals. The temperature for cold pressing must be lower than 30 °C.

Virgin oil: Indicates that the olives are pressed to extract oil. No heat or chemicals are used during this process.

6.2 Sunflower oil

Sunflower oil is most commonly used as cooking oil. The oil is pressed from sunflower seeds. Sunflower oil can withstand high cooking temperatures. The oil is light in taste and appearance. It was first produced in Mexico.

6.3 Canola oil

Years ago **Canola oil** was made from a cultivar of either rapeseed or field mustard. The name Canola is derived from **Canadian oil, low acid**. A Canola plant was bred in Canada in the 1970s and nowadays canola oil is pressed from the canola seeds. Canola oil contains no cholesterol and has a high smoking point.

6.4 Grape seed oil

Grape seed oil is an Italian product. The oil is pressed from the seed of different varieties of grapes. The seeds are a by-product of winemaking. Grape seed oil is ideal for high temperature cooking and can be used in stir fries, marinades, salad dressings and mayonnaise, or as a base for oil infusions, e.g. basil oil.

6.5 Avocado oil

Avocado oil is a nutty-flavoured oil that is pressed from avocados. This oil is used as a base for infusions or as a cooking oil. Avocado oil was first produced in Chile.



Cooking oil

EXTRA ACTIVITIES



Knowledge and comprehension

1. Explain the difference between herbs and spices. (10)
2. What spices are used for the following?
 - 2.1 Curry (4)
 - 2.2 Garam masala (6)
3. How would you store the following herbs?
 - 3.1 Fresh herbs (3)
 - 3.2 Dried herbs (2)
4. Peppercorns are berries that grow in grape-like clusters on a pepper plant. What colour peppercorns can you buy at a store? (4)
5. Name two plants which are both a herb and a spice. (2)

Extension

- 6.1 Saffron is dried flower stigmas. How would you prepare saffron for cooking? (2)
- 6.2 Name three dishes in which saffron can be used. (3)
- 7.1 Name the plant from which vanilla is grown. (1)
- 7.2 How would you use a vanilla pod if you were making a crème anglaise? (2)
- 7.3 Explain the difference between vanilla paste, vanilla extract and vanilla essence. (3)
8. Why is original balsamic vinegar more expensive than commercially produced balsamic vinegar? (2)
- 9.1 Name three types of olive oil. (3)
- 9.2 Which olive oil would be the best to use as part of a salad dressing? Motivate your answer. (2)