



# THE Main INGREDIENT

November/December 2018

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## Spices 101



For many years, what commonly came to mind with the term "spices" were black pepper, garlic and paprika. With the advent of the internet, social media, increased travel and access to cooking shows from around the world, we've become more adventurous and sophisticated in our tastes. We now have a wonderful potpourri of spices in a variety of colours, textures and flavours to enhance even the simplest dishes. Spices are also a great clean label solution – they're fresh, healthy, wholesome, rich and aromatic.

## Spice or Herb?

The general definition for spices includes the dried seed, fruit, root, or bark of edible plants. Herbs often refer to the leafy part of the plant. However, it's quite common to use the word 'spices' as a reference for both. Spices are grown all over the world and some, such as saffron and vanilla, are still harvested manually, as has been the tradition for centuries. Many farmers bring their spices to market through trading co-operatives. More than one country can be a source for a particular spice and the quality (flavour and colour) may differ, since climate, soil conditions, time of harvesting and post-harvest processes are all factors that affect final quality.



Spices can be used for flavour, colour, oxidation stability and as an antimicrobial. They are also recognized for their traditional benefits – stimulating our appetite, enhancing digestion, relieving stress and boosting energy.

# What's in a **spice** and how **hot is HOT?**



Spices are primarily composed of fiber, sugar, fat, protein, ash, gum and essential oils. The volatile (or essential) oils in a spice provide the aroma. Oil content varies from spice to spice and can range from 1% to 5%. Cinnamon, cardamom, cloves and turmeric have high oil content. The primary chemical components of the essential oils are terpene compounds which consist of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. The non-volatile oils include gums, resins, antioxidants and hydrophilic compounds which contribute to the taste of a spice.



Many spices contain colouring compounds such as carotenoids, flavonoids and chlorophyll. The most popular spices used for their colour are saffron, paprika, turmeric, parsley and annatto (seeds from the tropical achiote tree, aka lipstick tree). Spice colour can be affected by pH, cooking, light and the presence of metals (eg. alum). The measure for the colour of paprika is based on the colour unit specifications defined by the American Spice Trade Association (ASTA). Colour units (cu) reference the extractable colour of paprika pods and powder. As an example, 80asta means more brown/red in colour and 140asta will be a more vibrant red. It's interesting to note that the higher the ASTA colour units, the higher the price.



The flavour of spices can vary from mild to very strong and can be affected during cooking. Compared to sesame and poppy seeds, which become more flavourful when roasted, fresh basil loses its aroma when cooked at high temperatures. (Spice Science and Technology, pg. 8, Kenji Hirasa, Mitsuo Takemasa, Marcel Dekker, Inc. New York. 1998). Pungency describes the flavour of a spice. According to Wikipedia, pungency is the technical term scientists use to describe the characteristic of food commonly referred to as spiciness or hotness and sometimes heat (as with chili peppers). The Scoville scale is a commonly used measure of the 'hotness' of a chili pepper. The scale measures Scoville Heat Units (SHU), based on the concentration of the chemical compound, capsaicin. A sweet pepper will have a Scoville rating of zero, compared to habanero peppers which have a rating of 300,000 or higher.

## did you know?

Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale and kohlrabi are a result of selective breeding of the wild mustard plant.



Mexico grows over 140 varieties of chili peppers, but China is the world's largest chili pepper exporter.



# Functional & flavourful

Spices can help prevent rancidity and extend shelf life by slowing the oxidation of fats and enzymes, which in turn blocks the human cells from free radicals.<sup>1</sup> The most effective spices for this are sage, rosemary, oregano, thyme and marjoram. Antimicrobial benefits are also found in mustard, garlic, chili peppers, cloves, cinnamon and ginger. To be fully effective high usage levels would be required, but this can result in overpowering flavour. However, spice benefits can complement the functional benefits of other antimicrobial ingredients.



**WORLDWIDE  
STANDARDS  
FOR SPICES  
& HERBS?**

International spice standards for the quality of spices are provided by the American Spice Trade Association (ASTA), the U.S Federal Specifications and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). In 2014, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) set up a Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs. Its purpose was to elaborate worldwide standards for spices and herbs.

[www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/committees/committee/en/?committee=CCSCH](http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/committees/committee/en/?committee=CCSCH)

<sup>1</sup> Spices, Seasonings & Flavorings, Susheela Raghavan Uhl, pg. 39, Technomic Publishing Company, Inc. Pennsylvania. 2000



## Is it Cinnamon or is it Cassia?

### Are you buying the real deal?

Ceylon cinnamon, native to Sri Lanka and southern parts of India, is the true cinnamon and comes from the bark of a plant called *cinnamomum zeylanicum*. Its oil content is lower than that of cassia, at 1-2% and it has a more rounded flavour that is lighter, with more vanilla and floral notes. Cassia, often referred to as Chinese cinnamon, is a dark brown-red colour with a stronger flavour. It's less expensive than Ceylon cinnamon and is typically the 'cinnamon' found in supermarkets.

## Christmas Quiz — Santa's List of Spicy Questions

1. What's more expensive - gold or saffron?



2. Is allspice really a spice?



3. What is the Carolina Reaper?



Answers on back page.



## Look Who's Joining the Malabar Team!



Malabar is proud to announce that Mark Brewster has joined our team in the role of President. Mark has over 20 years of sales and senior management experience in ingredient manufacturing and distribution in the food industry. Doris Valade will move from the position of President to CEO and looks forward to working with Mark to expand Malabar's sales opportunities through all segments of the food industry, while maintaining the company's commitment to providing quality spices and ingredients along with superior customer service.

## Christmas Quiz – Answers

1. Saffron is more expensive than gold. Why? To produce 1 lb. (450g) of dry saffron requires the harvest of up to 75,000 flowers and 20 hours of labour. Vanilla is one of the most complex spices in the world and the second most expensive, next to saffron. A recent 2018 Business Insider report noted that by weight, vanilla's price is higher than silver.
2. Allspice, despite its name, is a single berry not a blend of spices. It was first named 'pimento' (Spanish for "pepper") when discovered in the Caribbean by Christopher Columbus.
3. The world's hottest chili pepper in 2018 is the Carolina Reaper grown in Fort Mills, South Carolina, USA. It had an SHU measure of 2,200,000.

## upcoming events

**November 22 - 25, 2018**

24th Annual Gourmet Food & Wine Expo,  
Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Toronto, Ontario. [foodandwineexpo.ca](http://foodandwineexpo.ca)

**Feb 12 - 14, 2019**

International Production & Processing Expo (IPPE),  
Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. [ippexpo.com](http://ippexpo.com)

**May 4 - 9, 2019**

IFFA 2019, The leading international trade fair for the meat industry.  
Frankfurt, Germany. [iffa.messefrankfurt.com](http://iffa.messefrankfurt.com)

## president's message

Spices are as much a part of Christmas as Christmas carols and presents. Think of the smell of cinnamon as the cookies come out of the oven, or the bright green colour of the sprigs of rosemary around the lamb roast. We traditionally add spices to foods for flavour and colour, without any understanding as to the science of spices and their impact on taste. Now that spices have become the natural choice for flavour, science is catching up to help us understand the complexity of spices. One great reference is Harold McGee's book, "On Food and Cooking". This book is a great reference to the scientific understanding and preparation of food, particularly Chapter 8, which focuses on flavourings from herbs and spices. In understanding the chemistry behind the flavour of a spice, the author explains that it is a combination of several flavours, including his example of coriander, which is both flowery and lemony. The author also explains why the pain of eating hot chilies is also pleasurable. We still have a lot to learn about spices, but the journey promises to be a flavourful one!



On behalf of all of us here at Malabar, we wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and the Best in 2019!

Doris Valade  
CEO,  
Malabar Super Spice Co. Ltd.



Look for our next edition in January/February 2019

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For more information on any of the subjects covered in this newsletter, or to suggest topics you'd like to see covered in future editions, please contact Tammy Raspberry at [orders@malabarsuperspice.com](mailto:orders@malabarsuperspice.com)

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