**The long history of spices**

***Introduction***

You already know that having a well-stocked spice rack or cabinet is essential to preparing a good meal, and you probably have rescued more than one dish by having just the right spice on hand. But did you know that spices have been used for thousands of years for everything from embalming Egyptian pharaohs to warding off evil spirits? Spices also have been used to treat a host of illnesses, they have led to wars, and they have motivated dozens of explorers to seek and discover new lands.

In the pages that follow, you will discover more about the fascinating history of spices. Although we don’t typically employ spices in as many ways as did our predecessors, you’ll find that Outlander Spices will add a taste of adventure to your dishes and will help you explore new ways to prepare your favorite dishes. And they might even cure an ailing recipe or two.

***The medicinal use of spices***

*Spices as ancient medicine*

The people who first used spices likely were not looking to flavor their food. Instead, the enticing aromas of bay, cinnamon, clove, and nutmeg trees probably first drew them, curious to know the taste of a plant with such an intriguing smell. Out of this curiosity came different theories about the use of the spices derived from fragrant trees and plants. For if it was made with such an enticing smell, might not it follow that they had been lured to it for this reason?

In terms of medicine, two main theories dominated the use of spices. The first held that the physical appearance or nature of the vegetation provided a suggestion as to what medical condition it ought to remedy. For example, an herb that produces a red juice when squeezed ought to indicate its use in healing wounds. Likewise, an herb or plant that grows on stony ground might be used to treat kidney stones.

Another doctrine held that herbs with physical properties opposite of those indicated by a patient’s physical symptoms ought to be used to restore a sort of natural balance. Therefore, if a patient suffered from a fever, then cool, moist herbs would be used to counteract the effects on the body and restore equilibrium. If you’ve ever heard of someone described as sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, or melancholic, then you’re aware of the consequences of this view of herbal medicine—until the seventeenth century, Western medicine divided matter into these four elements, which corresponded to air, water, fire, and earth, and treatment of illnesses was guided by the belief that these “humors” ought to exist in balance with one another.

*Spices as modern medicine*

While medical theories such as that of the bodily humors seem quaint to use today, many don’t realize that spices and herbs are still used extensively in medicine. More than 40 percent of today’s medicines originate in nature, rather than in the laboratory. For example, star anise is a critical component of the drug FluRid, which may be one of the only drugs able to reduce the serenity of the “Bird Flu” that has been in the news. The plant, from which we also get one of Outlander Spices’ most popular products, contains shikimic acid, which is a necessary ingredient of the flu medicine.

***The spice trade***

*A funny thing happened on the way to the Spice Lands…*

The spice trade has driven a good deal of history, leading to wars, sustaining economies, and compelling a slew of explorers to set out into uncharted waters in search of a more direct route to the “Spice Lands.” Among the most famous of explorers to sail in search of such a route was Christopher Columbus. Of course, he never made it to those spice-producing countries, but his original quest colored his interpretation of what he did discover.

On October 19, 1492, Columbus wrote in his journal, “It is true that in the event of finding places where there is gold or spices in quantity I should remain until I had collected as much as I could.” While he didn’t find the source of those valuable spices that he was searching for, he did manage to bring a previously unknown continent to the attention of European explorers. Meanwhile, however, Columbus wasn’t ready to concede defeat so easily. He christened the native peoples he found “Indians” and called the spicy chilis he ate “peppers,” believing he had discovered the source of that coveted spice.