**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 sererity 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 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.

**Bay leaf**

Scientific name: Laurus nobilis



*About this spice*

Also known as “noble laurel” and “sweet bay,” the bay tree can grow to a height of 30 feet in its native Mediterranean environment. When fresh, bay leaves have a slightly bitter taste; however, as they dry, they sweeten and have a strong aroma. Our bay leaves are shipped whole, and the light-green, brittle leaves are ready for use in a number of recipes.

*How to use this spice*

The various uses of bay leaf are too many to list, but we’ll list a few that you’ll find especially welcome in your kitchen. But don’t get carried away! Bay leaf is a powerful spice—a half of a leaf is usually enough to begin with. Use bay leaf to flavor the following:

* marinades
* stews and soups
* dishes that use cooked tomatoes
* fish
* puddings and sauces
* pickles

*Spice trivia*

Next time you watch the Olympics, think about the important role that the bay leaf has played in the games. Victors traditionally were crowned with bay wreaths or garlands. Also, we get the term “baccalaureate” (literally, “laurel berries”), which refers to academic honors, from the bay. Bay leaves (and other parts of the bay tree) also have been used medicinally, to treat such things as infection, and as an insect repellant. Such is the power of the bay, that it also was used to keep evil “at bay.”

**Cinnamon**

Scientific name: Cinnamomum verum



*About this spice*

A member of the same family (Lauraceae) as bay, the cinnamon tree also can reach heights of 30 feet or more. The spice you know as cinnamon comes from the bark of the tree, and the best cinnamon comes from the pale bark of young shoots. The bark is stripped and dried, after which it curls into “quills.” Ground cinnamon is best bought in small quantities, as the spice loses its flavor quickly.

*How to use this spice*

Cinnamon has a sweet flavor and a distinct aroma that you probably associate with dessert. In addition to many Middle Eastern and North African dishes, you can use cinnamon to flavor the following:

* sweet creams
* chocolate
* cakes and baked goods
* milk and rice puddings
* fruit desserts

*Spice trivia*

You know that Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492. But did you know that he was looking for cinnamon? Columbus and other explorers set out to find a direct sea route to the “spice lands.” Among others, cinnamon was one of the principal spices that motivated this exploration in the 15th Century. In addition, cinnamon, one of the first known spices, has been used for everything from embalming to mouthwash.

**Cloves**

Scientific name: Syzygium aromaticum (Eugenia caryophyllus)



*About this spice*

The leaves of the clove tree are similar to those of the bay. The clove tree thrives only in tropical, seaside climates. The pinkish-red flower buds, which contain yellow petals and a mass of stamens, are harvested and dried until they turn brown. Cloves have a strong, warming flavor and aroma.

*How to use this spice*

Because clove oil is highly scented, a little bit will go a long way. For example, a single, whole clove will flavor an entire apple pie. Use cloves to flavor the following:

* meats
* desserts
* spice mixtures
* salad dressings

*Spice trivia*Cloves contain a strong antiseptic and have a slight anesthetic quality. Some people chew cloves to ease a toothache. Traditionally, they have been used to treat nausea and indigestion. At various times, wars have been fought over the rights to the clove industry.

**Coriander**

Scientific name: Coriandrum sativum



*About this spice*

Coriander is made from the seeds of the dried fruit of the coriander plant. The leaves are used to make another spice, cilantro. The seeds have a strong, sweet aroma and a slightly bitter citrus flavor. The plant grows wild in southeast Europe and also is found in India, China, Egypt, and Morocco.

*How to use this spice*

Cilantro seeds are easy to crush, so they are best bought whole. Use coriander to flavor the following:

* liqueurs
* stews
* pickles
* marinades
* beans
* chili
* pastries

*Spice trivia*

Coriander also is known as “dizzycorn” because it can have a narcotic effect when eaten in very large quantities. Long used by monks as a medicine to treat maladies, it is still used today in some medicines to hide the unpleasant medicine taste.

**Cumin**

Scientific name: Cuminum cyminum



*About this spice*

A member of the same family (Umbelliferae) as coriander, the cumin plant has the same slender stems and segmented, threadlike leaves. The seeds are used to make the spice cumin, which has a powerful, warming aroma and a sharp and slightly bitter flavor.

*How to use this spice*

Lightly roasting cumin before use will bring out the aroma. If ground, it must be kept in an airtight container, so that it won’t lose its pungency. Used in excess, it can overwhelm the other spices in a dish. Commonly found in spicy dishes, you can use cumin to flavor the following:

* curry powder
* chili powder
* stews
* rice

*Spice trivia*

Cumin traditionally has been thought of as a panacea, able to cure whatever ails you. Specifically, it was thought that cumin could cure digestive conditions, and it also has been used to reduce nausea in pregnancy.

**Nutmeg**

Scientific name: Myristica fragrans



*About this spice*

The nutmeg tree is an evergreen that grows to a height of almost 30 feet. Inside the large, yellow fruit is the heavy seed used to make the spice nutmeg. The bright red membrane surrounding the seed is called aril or mace, which is used separately to make another spice.

*How to use this spice*

You should buy nutmeg whole, since they lose their strength quickly once cut. When you need some for a recipe, use a cheese grater or a special nutmeg grater. Commonly used in sweet and savory dishes, you can use nutmeg to flavor the following:

* cakes
* sweet cream
* milk puddings
* soufflés
* apple pie
* stewed potatoes
* eggnog

*Spice trivia*

Nutmeg traditionally has been used as an aid to digestion. Taken in very large doses, it is a dangerous narcotic; in small doses, however, it is a mild sedative. Even if you use a large dose of nutmeg in your dishes, you need not be concerned about its negative effects.

**Pepper**

Scientific name: Piper nigrum



*About this spice*

In the wild, the pepper vine climbs about 20 feet up jungle trees; .on a plantation, though, it’s typically about half that height. Black pepper is made from the berries that grow on the vine. They are harvested while still unripe and then dried until they are shriveled and black. White pepper, on the other hand, is made from the ripe berries. Pepper has a hot, pungent aroma and flavor.

*How to use this spice*

Buy whole peppercorns to ensure that the flavor doesn’t deteriorate, and grind them with a pepper mill prior to use. Pepper is ubiquitous as a spice; grind some fresh pepper over almost any dish to add flavor. In addition, add whole peppercorns to marinades, stock, and stews for extra flavor.

*Spice trivia*

More than any other spice, pepper historically has driven the spice trade. In fact, when Columbus landed in America looking for pepper (among other spices), he brought back the hot chilies used by the native peoples and claimed they were “pepper.” To this day, they’re known as “chili peppers.” (In fact, the pepper vine isn’t native to the Americas; however, Brazil today is one of the world’s largest pepper producers.) At times throughout history, pepper has even been used as a form of money. Part of its value lies in the fact that whole peppercorns can last many years without losing their flavor and aroma. In addition to its historical value, pepper also has been used as a stimulant and an aid to digestion.

**Star anise**Scientific name: Illicium verum

*About this spice*

Native to China and Vietnam, star anise is the star-shaped fruit of the star anise tree, a small evergreen. Each point of the star contains a seed. Just before they are ripe, the stars are harvested and dried. Star anise has a strong aroma and a bitter flavor.

*How to use this spice*

Some recipes call for whole stars to be added, while others call variously for segments, points, or sections of the star. The stars also may be ground. However it is used, though, star anise is a powerful spice. In particular, use it to flavor the following dishes:

* meat and poultry
* Chinese stocks and soups
* fruit compotes
* jams

*Spice trivia*

Recently, star anise has made the headlines as an ingredient of the drug FluRid, which is used to reduce the severity of “Bird Flu.” So don’t be surprised if there’s a shortage of the spice, as large quantities will be needed to manufacture the drug. The process of extracting the necessary shikimic acid from star anise takes a year.

**Turmeric**

Scientific name: Curcuma domestica

*About this spice*

The turmeric root is similar to the knobby ginger root. Its flavor resembles that of a cross between ginger and pepper. Turmeric roots are harvested, boiled, peeled, dried, and then powdered to produce the spice. It has a pungent aroma and a mild, warming flavor.

*How to use this spice*

In addition to its uses for flavoring food, turmeric is used to color foods such as mustard, relish, butter, and cheese. While it retains its color for a long time, it does lose its flavor over time; so buy it in small quantities. It always is used in its ground form and can add flavor to a number of Eastern and Middle Eastern dishes.

*Spice trivia*

Turmeric has been used for many years to color food. In fact, Marco Polo noted its use in his account of his travels to China.

**Spicy Buzzard Wings**Category: AppetizerYield: 6 servings2 tbsp. paprika1 tbsp. caraway seeds, crushed1 tbsp. dried onion flakes, crushed1 tbsp. dry mustard1 1⁄2 tsp. dried thyme leaves1 1⁄2 tsp. salt3⁄4 tsp. ground red pepper3 lb. chicken wings (about 18)Preheat oven to 425°. In a bowl, mix paprika, caraway seeds, onion flakes, dry mustard, thyme leaves, salt and ground red pepper.With hands, lightly pat paprika mixture on chicken wings.Brush chicken wings with Buzzard’s Best® Hot Wing Sauce.Place chicken wings in a large baking dish. Bake 30 minutes or until chicken wings are fork-tender. Place chicken wings on platter. Garnish with celery.**Montego Bay Jerk Chicken**Category: Main DishYield: 4 servings2 tbsp. lemon juice2 tbsp. lime juice1 tbsp. Dijon mustard1 Jalapeno pepper, chopped1 tsp. garlic, finely chopped2 cubes instant chicken bullion1⁄2 tsp. ground cumin1⁄4 tsp. dried thyme leaves1 lb. chicken breast halvesIn shallow baking dish, combine 3 tbsp. water and all ingredients, except chicken. Add chicken, coating well with Island Pit® Jerk Marinade.Cover dish and marinate in refrigerator 4 hours or overnight.Preheat grill or broiler.Remove chicken from marinade.Pour marinade into small pan and bring to a boil.Grill or broil chicken 15 to 20 minutes, basting frequently with marinade.**Big D Veggie Chile**Category: Soups and StewsYield: 8 servings1 can kidney beans 1 can white beans 1 can black beans 1 can black eyed peas 1 can pinto beans2 cans chopped stewed tomatoes 1 Vidalia onion, chopped1 red pepper, chopped2 cups vegetable broth 1 cup salsa1 tsp. Outlander® cumin 1 tsp. Outlander® chili powder 1 tsp. basil salt to taste Put all ingredients into a pot and simmer on low heat for 3 hours.**Crème Brulee**Category: DessertsYield: 12 servings4 1⁄4 cups heavy cream2 cups half and half1 cup granulated sugar1 tsp­. Outlander® vanilla12 egg yolksCombine cream, half and half, sugar and vanilla in a saucepan and slowly bring to a boil. Remove from heat and let sit for 20 minutes.Separate egg yolks into a large bowl and slowly whisk the warm cream mixture into the eggs. Strain through a sieve and refrigerate.Pour the custard into baking ramekins, and place in a large, flat baking pan.Fill the baking pan with hot water until the level covers the bottom half of the ramekins.Cover the pan with foil and place in a pre-heated 325° oven.Bake approximately 50 minutes, or until the top is smooth and free of liquid.Cool in refrigerator for two hours. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon of granulated sugar as evenly as possible over the brulee and immediately caramelize with a blow torch.**Wasabi Pork Tenderloin**Category: Main DishesYield: 6 servings1⁄4 cup Outlander® Wasabi Basting Sauce1⁄4 cup soy sauce2 large cloves garlic, chopped1⁄4 cup Dijon mustard1⁄2 tsp. ground ginger2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce1⁄4 cup vegetable oil2 pork tenderloins, about 1 1⁄2 to 2 poundsCombine Wasabi basting sauce, soy sauce, garlic, mustard, ginger, Worcestershire sauce, and oil, mixing until smooth.Place tenderloin and marinade in a food storage bag, and place in refrigerator for at least 4 hours.Cook on grill 15 to 25 minutes, until the internal temperature has reached 165° and is no longer pink in the center, basting occasionally while cooking. Slice in 1⁄2-inch thick slices to serve.