

Herbs & Spices (Source: www.culinarycafe.com)

Allspice

General Description

Allspice is the dried, unripe berry of *Pimenta dioica*, an evergreen tree in the myrtle family. After drying, the berries are small, dark brown balls just a little larger than peppercorns.

Geographical Sources

Allspice comes from Jamaica, Mexico, and Honduras.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Allspice is used in Jamaican jerk seasoning and in Jamaican soups, stews, and curries. It also is used in pickling spice, spiced tea mixes, cakes, cookies, and pies. Food producers use it in ketchup, pickles, and sausages.

Taste and Aroma

Allspice is pungent and fragrant. It is not a blend of "all spices," but its taste and aroma remind many people of a mix of cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg.

History/Region of Origin

Christopher Columbus discovered Allspice in the Caribbean. Although he was seeking pepper, he had never actually seen real pepper and he thought Allspice was it. He brought it back to Spain, where it got the name "pimienta," which is Spanish for pepper. Its Anglicized name, pimento, is occasionally used in the spice trade today. Before World War II, Allspice was more widely used than it is nowadays. During the war, many trees producing Allspice were cut, and production never fully recovered. Folklore suggests that Allspice provides relief for digestive problems.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

The warm sweet flavor of Allspice lends itself to a wide variety of foods. Allspice is commonly used in both savory and sweet foods. Try mixing 1/4 teaspoon ground Allspice with 2 pounds of ground beef to give a unique flavor to meatloaf or hamburgers. Or, add 1 teaspoon of ground Allspice to angel food or white cake mix for a sensational spicy flavor. Aromatic whole Allspice is a great addition to potpourri. Add a few Whole Allspice to your pepper grinder, along with a mixture of black, white, and green peppercorns for a unique seasoning blend. For an intriguing spiciness, add whole, cracked berries to marinades for chicken and pork, simmering beef stew, pot roasts, or hearty bean soups. Enhance simple desserts such as applesauce, fruit compotes, and oatmeal cookies with the warm, sweet flavor of Ground Allspice. Add a pinch of Ground Allspice to barbecue and tomato sauces as well as cooked winter squash and carrots. Allspice may be substituted for cloves. To grind Allspice at home, do not use a grinder with plastic parts, because the oil in the spice can cloud plastic.

Anise Seed

General Description

Anise Seed is a gray-brown oval seed from *Pimpinella anisum*, a plant in the parsley family. It is related to caraway, dill, cumin, and fennel.

Geographical Sources

Spain and Mexico.

Traditional Ethnic

Uses Europeans use Anise in cakes, cookies, and sweet breads. In the Middle East and India, it is used in soups and stews. Its licorice like flavor is popular in candies and Anise oil is used in liqueurs.

Taste and Aroma

Anise Seeds smell and taste like licorice.

History/Region of Origin

Anise is native to the Middle East and has been used as a medicine and as a flavor for medicine since prehistoric times. Ancient Romans hung Anise plants near their pillows to prevent bad dreams. They also used Anise to aid digestion and ward off epileptic attacks. Colonists in the New World used it as a medicinal crop too.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Give fish and shellfish a wonderful Mediterranean flavor by adding Anise Seed to seafood stews. Make a quick sauce for grilled fish by combining melted butter, toasted Anise Seed, lemon juice, and minced green onion. To add special flavor and texture to baked goods, brush rolls or sugar cookies with beaten egg white and sprinkle with Anise Seed before baking. Anise Seeds naturally have short, hairlike "webs." Most of the webs are removed in processing, but since they carry flavor it is not necessary for all webbing to be eliminated.

Arrowroot

General Description

Arrowroot is a white powder extracted from the root of a West Indian plant, *Marantha arundinacea*. It looks and feels like cornstarch.

Geographical Sources

Arrowroot is grown in Brazil and Thailand

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Arrowroot is used as a thickening agent for sauces, fruit pie fillings and glazes, and puddings.

Taste and Aroma

Arrowroot has no flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Arrowroot is indigenous to the West Indies, where native people, the Arawaks, used the powder. The Arawaks used the substance to draw out toxins from people wounded by poison arrows. Its name is thought to be derived from that practice.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Arrowroot mixtures thicken at a lower temperature than mixtures made with flour or cornstarch. Mix Arrowroot with cool liquids before adding hot liquids, then cook until mixture thickens. Remove immediately to prevent mixture from thinning. Two teaspoons of Arrowroot can be substituted for 1 tablespoon of cornstarch. One teaspoon of Arrowroot can be substituted for 1 tablespoon of flour. Arrowroot makes clear, shimmering fruit gels and prevents ice crystals from forming in homemade ice cream.

Basil, Sweet

General Description

Basil is a bright green, leafy plant, *Ocimum basilicum*, which is in the mint family.

Geographical Sources

Basil is grown primarily in the United States, France, and the Mediterranean region.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Basil is widely used in Italian cuisine and is often paired with tomatoes. It is also used in Thai cooking. The herb complements meat, vegetables, cheese, and egg dishes.

Taste and Aroma

Basil has a sweet, herbal bouquet.

History/Region of Origin

Basil originated in India and Persia, and was both prized and despised by ancient peoples. Though its name means, "be fragrant," Greeks hated it. However, the Romans loved it and made it a symbol of love and fertility and settlers in early America prized it. Today, Hindus plant it in their homes to bring happiness to the family.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Basil tastes great in tomato and pasta dishes but it also gives a sweetscented, minty aroma when crumbled over baked chicken, lamb, or fish. It blends well with garlic, thyme, and oregano. Crush dried leaves with your hand or in a mortar and pestle to release the herb's flavor. Start with 1/2 teaspoon for 4 servings; add more to taste.

Bay Leaves

General Description

Bay Leaves come from the sweet bay or laurel tree, known botanically as *Laurus nobilis*. The elliptical leaves of both trees are green, glossy, and grow up to 3 inches long.

Geographical Sources

Bay Leaves are grown in the Mediterranean region.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Bay Leaves, a staple in American kitchens, are used in soups, stews, meat and vegetable dishes. The leaves also flavor classic French dishes such as bouillabaise and bouillon.

Taste and Aroma

Bay Leaves are pungent and have a sharp, bitter taste.

History/Region of Origin

Ancient Greeks and Romans crowned victors with wreaths of laurel. The term "baccalaureate," means laurel berry, and refers to the ancient practice of honoring scholars and poets with garlands from the bay laurel tree. Romans felt the leaves protected them against thunder and the plague. Later, Italians and the English thought Bay Leaves brought good luck and warded off evil.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

The Bay Leaf is useful in hearty, homestyle cooking. When you are making bean, split pea and vegetable soups, meat stews, spaghetti sauce, and chili, a Bay leaf can be added for a more pungent flavor. Alternate whole Bay Leaves with meat, seafood, or vegetables on skewers before cooking. Be sure to remove Bay Leaves before eating a dish that has finished cooking. The whole leaves are used to impart flavor only and are bitter and hard to chew.

Caraway Seed

General Description

Caraway Seed is actually the fruit of a biennial herb in the parsley family, known as *Carum carvi*. The seed is about 1/5 inch long and tapered at the ends. The hard seed shells have five pale ridges.

Geographical Sources

Holland is the world's largest Caraway producer. It is also grown in Germany, Russia, Morocco, parts of Scandinavia, Canada, and the United States.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Caraway Seed is a common flavoring for many kinds of rye bread. It is also used to flavor sauerkraut, sausage, cheese, cabbage, and soups.

Taste and Aroma

Caraway Seed has a pungent aroma and a distinctly sweet but tangy flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Caraway is native to Asia as well as northern and central Europe. First used in antiquity, Caraway has been cultivated in Europe since the Middle Ages. Evidence of Caraway's use in medieval times comes from seeds found in debris in lakes in Switzerland. Caraway is thought to be the spice used longer than any other in Europe. Writings from the 17th century indicate that Caraway Seed was used in breads, fruits, and cakes, and considered a digestive aid.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

For enhanced flavor, lightly toast Caraway Seed before use in cheese dishes or potato salad. Caraway Seed is great for use in sauerkraut, soups, and stews; add Caraway in the last 15 minutes of cooking for best flavor. Sprinkle Caraway Seed lightly over spice cakes before baking. Mix 1/4 cup melted butter with 1 to 2 teaspoons Caraway Seed; spread on French bread or pour over green beans.

Cardamom

General Description

Cardamom is the ground seed of a tropical fruit in the ginger family known as *Elettaria cardamomum*. The seeds are found in oval shaped fruit pods that are between 1/4 and 1 inch long.

Geographical Sources

Cardamom comes from India, Guatemala, and Ceylon.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

In India Cardamom is traditionally used in curry blends, and in Scandinavian countries it is commonly added to breads;

however, most of the world's Cardamom crop is used in Arabic countries as a flavoring for coffee.

Taste and Aroma

Cardamom has an intense, pungent, sweet flavor.

History/Region of Origin

As early as the 4th century BC Cardamom was used in India as a medicinal herb. Greeks and Romans imported it as a digestive aid. In Sweden it has become a more popular spice than cinnamon.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

A small amount of Cardamom will add a tempting flavor to coffee cake, Danish pastry, specialty breads, and apple pie. Try Cardamom the Arabic way and add a little to your ground coffee before brewing, then sweeten and top with cream.

Cayenne Pepper

General Description

Cayenne Pepper is made from the dried pods of pungent chili peppers. This fiery spice adds flair to dishes from Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East.

Geographical Sources

Cayenne Pepper comes from Central and South America and the West Indies.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Cayenne Pepper is traditionally used in Mexican and Italian cooking.

Taste and Aroma

Cayenne Pepper has little aroma, but it is extremely hot to taste.

History/Region of Origin

Cayenne Peppers were grown for thousands of years in the West Indies and Central and South America. Spanish explorers looking for black pepper misnamed them as pepper, and introduced them to the rest of the world. One of Columbus' passengers, de Cuneo, wrote how the Native Americans ate pepperlike fruit "like we eat apples."

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Try adding Cayenne Pepper to salsa, avocado dip, taco, and enchilada sauces for extra zesty flavor. You can heat up a barbecue sauce or meat marinade with a shake of Cayenne Pepper. Spice up your tartar sauce or vegetable dips and dressings with a pinch of Cayenne Pepper. You can make South of the Border omelets with tomatoes, onions, peppers, and a pinch of Cayenne Pepper added to the eggs.

Celery Seed

General Description

Celery Seed is the dried fruit of *Apium graveolens*, a biennial in the parsley family. This is the same genus and species used for growing table celery, although there are particular varieties that are used for the vegetable. The seeds are very small (about 1/16th of an inch), ovoid and light brown.

Geographical Sources

Celery Seed is grown in France and India.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Celery or as the ancients called it "smallage" has been used as a medicine since the time of the Greeks. In the Middle Ages, it was discovered that cultivation produced a much superior plant. At that time people began to use it more widely as a vegetable. It was not until the 19th century that the seeds were used in recipes, appearing first in pickling recipes.

Taste and Aroma

Celery Seed tastes similar to table celery, with its warm, slightly bitter, aromatic flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Celery Seed and table celery are grown from a domesticated variety of a wild plant known as "smallage." Smallage was grown by Greeks and Romans for medicinal qualities. It was associated with funerals and bad luck.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Celery Seed is useful for adding a celery flavor to foods when the "crunch" of celery is not desired. Stir some into clam, potato, or other creamy soups. Add a pinch to blue cheese dressings and spoon the dressing over ripe tomatoes.

Chervil

General Description

Chervil is a light green, lacey, fernlike leaf of *Anthriscus cerefolium*, a low growing member of the parsley family.

Geographical Sources

Chervil is grown in California and New Mexico.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Chervil is one of the classic components of the popular French herb blend, fines herbes.

Taste and Aroma

The leaves of this aromatic and sweet herb bear a slight resemblance to parsley; however, the flavor is more distinctive with a trace of anise.

History/Region of Origin

Chervil is native to southern Russia. Pliny, in the first century, used Chervil as a seasoning. The Romans took it to France where it has been important for centuries. Only recently has it been cultivated and used in the United States.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Chervil brings out the flavor of other herbs. Stir it into scrambled eggs or cheese and ham omelets. Chervil is useful for adding color and flavor to creamy dressings for pasta and potato salads. Add it to buttersauced mushrooms and serve over grilled steak or chicken breasts. Crush Chervil in your hand or with a mortar and pestle before use.

Chives

General Description

Chives are the bright green, long, hollow, thin leaves of *Allium schoenoprasum*, an onion like member of the lily family.

Geographical Sources

California

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Chives are one of the herbs used in fines herbes, a traditional French herb blend. They also are great as a garnish.

Taste and Aroma

Chives have a mild, onionlike flavor, with a hint of garlic.

History/Region of Origin

Chives grow wild in both the Old and the New World. They have probably been used since ancient times, but they have only been cultivated since the Middle Ages.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Chives make an attractive garnish for many savory foods. With a delicate onion flavor, Chives won't overpower the flavor of fish. Add Chives at the last moment to hot foods, since heat lessens their flavor.

Cilantro

General Description

Cilantro is the leaf of the young coriander plant, *Coriandrum sativum*, an herb in the parsley family, similar to anise.

Geographical Sources

Cilantro is grown in California.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Cilantro is traditionally used in Middle Eastern, Mexican, and Asian cooking.

Taste and Aroma

Cilantro's taste is a fragrant mix of parsley and citrus.

History/Region of Origin

Coriander is probably one of the first herbs to be used by mankind, perhaps going back as far back as 5000 BC. It is mentioned in early Sanskrit writings dating from about 1500 BC. The Romans spread it throughout Europe, and it was one of the first spices to arrive in America.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Before it is used, Cilantro should be crushed, either by hand or with a mortar and pestle. Cilantro is a perfect addition to Mexican dishes; add Cilantro to salsas and bean dips. Mix crushed Cilantro into sour cream and use it as a topping for chili, tacos, or enchiladas. Sprinkle Cilantro over stir fried vegetables for color and Asian flavor. Add Cilantro to sesame-ginger dressing when making Chinese chicken salad.

Cinnamon

General Description

Cinnamon is the dried bark of various laurel trees in the cinnamomun family. One of the more common trees from which Cinnamon is derived is the cassia. Ground cinnamon is perhaps the most common baking spice. Cinnamon sticks are made from long pieces of bark that are rolled, pressed, and dried.

Geographical Sources

True Cinnamon is native to Sri Lanka. The Cinnamon used in North America is from the cassia tree which is grown in Vietnam, China, Indonesia, and Central America.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Possibly most the common baking spice, Cinnamon is used in cakes, cookies, and desserts throughout the world. Cinnamon is also used in savory chicken and lamb dishes from the Middle East. In American cooking, Cinnamon is often paired with apples and used in other fruit and cereal dishes. Stick Cinnamon is used in pickling and for flavoring hot beverages.

Taste and Aroma

Cinnamon has a sweet, woody fragrance in both ground and stick forms.

History/Region of Origin

Cinnamon has been popular since ancient times. Egyptians imported it from China in 2000 BC. Romans believed Cinnamon was sacred, and Nero burned a year's supply of the spice at the funeral for his wife. Finding Cinnamon was a primary motive of world exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

For a fragrant pilaf, cook rice in Cinnamon flavored broth and stir in chopped dried fruit and toasted nuts. The sweet-spicy flavor of Cinnamon enhances the taste of vegetables and fruits. Cinnamon is a perfect partner for chocolate; use it in any chocolate dessert or drink. It is used to mellow the tartness of apple pie. Ground Cinnamon should not be added to boiling liquids; the liquid may become stringy and the Cinnamon will lose flavor.

Cloves

General Description

Cloves are the rich, brown, dried, unopened flower buds of *Syzygium aromaticum*, an evergreen tree in the myrtle family. The name comes from the French "clou" meaning nail.

Geographical Sources

Cloves come from Madagascar, Brazil, Panang, and Ceylon.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Cloves are used in spice cookies and cakes. Much of the world crop is used in Indonesia for Clove cigarettes, called "kreteks".

Taste and Aroma

Cloves are strong, pungent, and sweet.

History/Region of Origin

Cloves are native to the Molucca Islands, now a part of Indonesia. Cloves have been used for thousands of years. One of the earliest references to them says that the Chinese, in order to approach the emperor, had to have a few Cloves in their mouths to sweeten the breath. Cloves were once very costly and played an important part in world history. Wars were fought in Europe and with native islanders to secure rights to the profitable Clove business. Natives in the Molucca Islands planted a Clove tree for each child born. They believed that the fate of the tree was linked to the fate of that child. In 1816, the Dutch set a fire to destroy Clove trees and raise prices. The natives revolted in a bloody battle which changed the climate and politics of the area forever.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Ground Cloves add spicy depth to gingerbread, cookies, applesauce, muffins, cakes, and other sweets. It's a secret ingredient in barbecue and cocktail sauces. Blend Ground Cloves with maple syrup and drizzle over cooked sweet potatoes and winter squash. Add a few Whole Cloves to bean and split pea soups (remove before serving). Eugenol (clove oil) will collect and cake in the container when Cloves are stored in a warm place. If you choose to grind your own Cloves, do not use a grinder that has plastic parts. Clove oil can cloud some plastics.

Coriander

General Description

Coriander is the seed of *Coriandrum sativum*, a plant in the parsley family. The seed is globular and almost round, brown to yellow red, and 1/5 inch in diameter with alternating straight and wavy ridges.

Geographical Sources

Coriander comes from Morocco and Romania.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Coriander is used in Indian curries, gin, American cigarettes, and sausages.

Taste and Aroma

Coriander has a mild, distinctive taste similar to a blend of lemon and sage.

History/Region of Origin

Coriander is probably one of the first spices used by mankind, having been known as early as 5000 BC. Sanskrit writings dating from about 1500 BC also spoke of it. In the Old Testament "manna" is described as "white like Coriander Seed." (Exodus 16:31) The Romans spread it throughout Europe and it was one of the first spices to arrive in America.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Coriander is not interchangeable with cilantro, although they are from the same plant. Ground Coriander seed is traditional in desserts and sweet pastries as well as in curries, meat, and seafood dishes with South American, Indian, Mediterranean, and African origins. Add it to stews and marinades for a Mediterranean flavor.

Cream of Tartar

General Description

Cream of Tartar is a natural, pure ingredient left behind after grape juice has fermented to wine.

Geographical Sources

Cream of Tartar is obtained from wine producing regions.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Cream of Tartar is used to stabilize egg white foams. It is also a major ingredient in baking powder.

Taste and Aroma

Cream of Tartar has no aroma and has an acidic flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Cream of Tartar has been known since ancient times.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

For craft dough, mix together 2 cups flour, 1 cup salt, and 2 tablespoons Cream of Tartar in a pan. Stir in 2 cups water, 1 tablespoon oil, and a few drops of food coloring. Cook and stir over medium heat until it forms a ball. Cool and store in a plastic bag until ready to use. Use 1/8 teaspoon per egg white to make souffles, meringues, angel food, chiffon cakes, and candy.

Cumin

General Description

Cumin (pronounced "comein") is the pale green seed of *Cuminum cyminum*, a small herb in the parsley family. The seed is uniformly elliptical and deeply furrowed.

Geographical Sources

Iran and India

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Cumin is frequently used in Mexican dishes such as chili con carne and hot tamales.

Taste and Aroma

Cumin has a distinctive, slightly bitter yet warm flavor.

History/Region of Origin

An ancient spice, Cumin is native to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and Egypt. Currently it is grown in many places, as it is rather easy to grow and adapts well to many climates. Cumin is one of the ancient spices, a favorite of the Romans and it is mentioned in the Old Testament. During medieval times, it was favored in Europe and Britain, but it seems to have gradually lost favor in those places. The increasing popularity of Mexican influenced foods is boosting the sale of Cumin.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

For a change of pace, try ground Cumin added to tangy lime or lemon based marinades for chicken, turkey, lamb, and pork. Or, add Cumin to chili, spicy meat stews, barbecue marinades, and sauces. Stir toasted Cumin into corn muffin batter to create an easy south of the border accent. Heat Cumin and garlic in olive oil and drizzle over cooked vegetables or potatoes. Ground Cumin is stronger than whole seeds. The Cumin flavor is accentuated by toasting.

Curry Powder

General Description

Curry Powder is a blend of many spices and is used widely in savory dishes throughout India and Southeast Asia.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

For a quick dip to complement fruit and vegetable sticks, blend sour cream or yogurt with Curry Powder, marmalade, and thyme. Try adding Curry Powder to deviled eggs and egg salads. You can easily make an East Indian marinade for chicken or lamb with Curry Powder, yogurt, lime or lemon juice, and garlic.

Dill Seed & Weed

General Description

Dill is a tall, feathery annual, *Anethum graveolens*, in the parsley family. Both Dill Seed and Weed (dried leaves) come from the same plant.

Geographical Sources

United States and India

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Dill Seed and Weed are widely used in pickling as well as in German, Russian, and Scandinavian dishes.

Taste and Aroma

The Dill Seed flavor is clean, pungent, and reminiscent of caraway. Dill Weed has a similar but mellow and fresher flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Dill is indigenous to the Mediterranean area and southern Russia. It has been used since ancient times. Babylonian and Syrian herbalists used it, and Romans thought it was an effective stimulant for gladiators. Although native to the Mediterranean region, it became a staple in northern Europe where it is still popular. In fact, the name is derived from the old Norse word "dilla" meaning "to lull" because it was used to lull babies to sleep, and as an antidote to witchcraft and sorcery. Dill Weed is currently gaining popularity in North America.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Dill Seed and Dill Weed are not good substitutions for each other. The seed has a camphorous, slightly bitter flavor, and the weed has a delicate flavor. Dill Seed is good sprinkled over casseroles before baking and used in salad dressings. Dill Weed, with its delicate flavor, enhances fish, shellfish, vegetables, and dips.

Fennel Seed

General Description

Fennel Seed is the oval, green or yellowish brown dried fruit of *Foeniculum vulgare*, a member of the parsley family.

Geographical Sources

India and Egypt

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Fennel goes well with fish and is used in Italian sausages and some curry powder mixes.

Taste and Aroma

Fennel has an anise like flavor but is more aromatic, sweeter and less pungent.

History/Region of Origin

Fennel is native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean area. The name comes from the Greek word for "marathon" because the famous battle at Marathon (490 BC) against the Persians was fought on a field of Fennel. Pliny said that snakes casting off their skins ate Fennel to restore their eyesight.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Toasting Fennel Seeds accentuates their flavor. Fennel Seed added to meatballs or meat loaf gives an authentic Italian flavor. Saute Fennel Seed with sliced peppers, onion, and sausage for a quick pasta sauce.

Garlic

General Description

Garlic is the dried root of *Allium sativum*, a member of the lily family. Garlic grows in a bulb that consists of a number of cloves. Each clove is protected by a layer of skin, but all are held together in one larger unit by additional layers of skin.

Geographical Sources

California

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Garlic is used in cuisines throughout the world. It is indispensable in Chinese, Italian, and Mexican foods.

Taste and Aroma

Garlic has a distinctive odor and flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Garlic is native to central Asia, but its use spread across the world more than 5000 years ago, before recorded history. It was worshiped by the Egyptians and fed to workers building the Great Pyramid at Giza, about 2600 BC. Greek athletes ate it to build their strength. Garlic came to the Western Hemisphere with some of the first European explorers, and its use spread rapidly. In the United States it was first cultivated in New Orleans by French settlers. Missionaries brought it to California, where it is grown today.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Use Minced Garlic or Garlic Chips in pasta sauces, stews, and soups. Mix with oil and vinegar and Italian spices to make salad dressing. Garlic Powder can be used in marinades, or mixed with herbs and rubbed into poultry, pork, or beef before cooking.

Ginger

General Description

Ginger is a flavoring from a tuberous root of *Zingiber officinale*, a plant in the Ginger family. The root is often dried and ground or "crystallized" with sugar.

Geographical Sources

India and Jamaica

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Ginger is used in gingerbread, ginger ale, gingersnaps, and Asian dishes.

Taste and Aroma

Ginger has a slightly biting and hot note. Its aroma is rich, sweet, warm, and woody.

History/Region of Origin

No one is sure how old Ginger is, or where it came from, since it has never been found growing wild. It was first cultivated by the Chinese and Indians. It was one of the important spices that led to the opening of the spice trade routes. The name Ginger comes from the Sanskrit word "sinabera" meaning "shaped like a horn" because of its resemblance to an antler. In the 19th century it was popular to keep a shaker of Ginger on the counter in English pubs so the patrons could shake some into their drinks. This practice was the origin of ginger ale.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Since ginger is a fibrous root, at times fibers may get into the manufactured product. Crystallized Ginger can replace fresh Ginger. Wash off the sugar first if desired when preparing a savory dish.

Horseradish

General Description

Horseradish is a hot, pungent condiment made from a plant in the mustard family. The powdered form of Horseradish is made by grinding the root and drying in a gentle heat. Horseradish vinegar is the root combined with shallots, onions, garlic, and red pepper in vinegar.

Geographical Sources

Oregon

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Its most common use is as a condiment for roast beef, fish, and oysters.

Taste and Aroma

Hot and pungent

History/Region of Origin

The earliest account of Horseradish comes from 13th century western Europe, where Germans and Danes used it as a condiment, stimulant, and digestive medicine. It was introduced in England in the 16th century, where it is still used to treat hoarseness and coughs. It was brought to the United States in the 19th century, and now grows wild along the East Coast.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Mix Spice Islands Horseradish into whipped cream or sour cream for a classic roast beef topping. Add Horseradish to dressings, mayonnaise, and other condiments for zippier salads, sandwiches, and dips. Blend Horseradish into tomato based cocktail sauce for a seafood or barbecue sauce for grilled meats.

Juniper Berries

General Description

Juniper Berries come from the juniper shrub, an evergreen in the genus juniperus, which grows in the Northern Hemisphere.

Geographical Sources

Europe and North America

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Juniper Berries are used in Northern Europe and the United States in marinades, roast pork, and sauerkraut. They enhance meat, stuffings, sausages, stews, and soups.

Taste and Aroma

Juniper Berries have a bittersweet aroma.

History/Region of Origin

Juniper Berries grow wild throughout the Northern Hemisphere and are used widely in Scandinavian and French kitchens.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Crush Juniper Berries before using. Use them in marinades for game, beef, or pork.

Mace

General Description

The nutmeg tree, *Myristica fragrans*, is special in that it produces two separate spices, nutmeg and Mace. Mace is the ground outer covering (aril) of the nutmeg seed. A piece of unground Mace is called a blade.

Geographical Sources

Indonesia, Grenada

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Mace is most popular in European foods where it is used in both savory and sweet dishes. It is the dominant flavor in doughnuts.

Taste and Aroma

Mace has a flavor and aroma similar to nutmeg, with slightly more pungency.

History/Region of Origin

Mace is indigenous to the Molucca Islands. There are both male and female trees and they are planted in a ratio of about 1 male tree for every 10 female trees. The Portuguese controlled the Mace trade until they were driven out by the Dutch in 1602. At one point the price of Mace was so high and nutmeg so low that one Dutch official, unaware that Mace and nutmeg came from the same tree, ordered growers to burn nutmeg trees and grow more Mace.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

One teaspoon ground Mace can be substituted for 1 tablespoon Mace blades. Mace lends a warm, fragrant, oldworld spiciness to many baked goods and sweets. You can also use it in an array of savory favorites, such as pates, creamed spinach, and mashed potatoes. It enlivens vegetables or macaroni and cheese. Try 1/8 teaspoon for 4 servings. Sprinkle on fruits, whipped cream, or anything chocolate. Mace can also be substituted for nutmeg.

Marjoram

General Description

Marjoram is the gray-green leaf of *Majorana hortensis*, a low growing member of the mint family. It is often mistaken for oregano, although they are not the same plant.

Geographical Sources

United States and France

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Marjoram is used as a flavoring for meat dishes.

Taste and Aroma

Marjoram has a delicate, sweet, pleasant flavor with a slightly bitter undertone.

History/Region of Origin

Marjoram is indigenous to the Mediterranean area and was known to the Greeks and Romans, who looked on it as a symbol of happiness. It was said that if marjoram grew on the grave of a dead person, he would enjoy eternal bliss.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Crush in your hand or with a mortar and pestle before using. Marjoram's mellow taste and enticing fragrance make it compatible with a wide variety of foods. It won't overpower: start with 1/2 teaspoon per 4 servings. Complements lamb dishes, as well as beef and veal. Marjoram blends well with parsley, dill, basil, or thyme. Try it in soups or stews.

Mint (Spearmint & Peppermint)

General Description

Mint is the dried leaf of a perennial herb. There are two important species, *Mentha spicata* L. (spearmint) and *Mentha piperita* L. (peppermint).

Geographical Sources

United States

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Mint jelly served with lamb, sprinkled in peas, or in chocolate desserts.

Taste and Aroma

Mint is strong and sweet with a tangy flavor and a cool after taste.

History/Region of Origin

Spearmint and peppermint are both native to Asia. Peppermint was used by Egyptians, and spearmint is mentioned in the Bible. Spearmint grew wild in the United States after the 1600s, and peppermint was cultivated commercially before the Civil War.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Use mint in salad dressings, flavored tea, and zesty marinades. Stir into warmed apple or currant jelly for a quick meat sauce or dessert topping.

Mustard Seed

General Description

Mustard Seed comes from two large shrubs, *Brassica juncea* (brown mustard) and *Brassica hirta* (white mustard), native to Asia. Both plants produce bright yellow flowers that contain small round seeds; brown mustard is more pungent than white.

Geographical Sources

Canada

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Mustard Seed's hot and spicy flavor enhances meats, fish, fowl, sauces, and salad dressings. Whole Mustard Seed may be used in pickling or in boiling vegetables such as cabbage or sauerkraut. Brown Mustard Seeds are an important flavoring in Indian dishes.

Taste and Aroma

Powdered Mustard has no aroma when dry, but a hot flavor is released when it is mixed with water.

History/Region of Origin

Mustard was used in ancient Greece and Rome as a medicine and a flavoring. By 800 AD, the French were using Mustard as an enhancement for drab meals and salted meats. It was one of the spices taken on Spanish explorations during the 1400s. Mustard powder was invented by Mrs. Clements of Durham, England, who made a fortune selling the dry, pale yellow mustard flour.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Before using, mix Mustard Powder with water to form a paste. It takes about 10 minutes for the mustard flavor to develop. Use in foods needing flavor highlights. Unlike other pungent spices, Mustard's flavor does not build or persist. Mustard helps emulsify liquids use in salad dressing recipes to help blend oil and vinegar and add a spicy zip.

Nutmeg

General Description

Nutmeg is the seed of *Myristica fragrans*, an evergreen tree native to the Molucca Islands. Interestingly, the tree produces both Nutmeg and mace, and grows up to 60 feet tall. Although the tree takes seven years to bear fruit, it may produce until the 90th year. Both spices come from the tree's fruit, which splits into a scarlet outer membrane, mace, and an inner brown seed, Nutmeg.

Geographical Sources

Nutmeg is grown in Indonesia and Grenada.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Nutmeg is a mild baking spice and is used in sausages, meats, soups, and preserves. Nutmeg is commonly added to eggnog, puddings, and fruit pies. It is popular in The Netherlands and Italy, where it is used in vegetables, puddings, and stews.

Taste and Aroma

Nutmeg is more pungent and sweeter than mace.

History/Region of Origin

The Roman philosopher Pliny wrote about Nutmeg and mace in the first century. Indian Vedic literature recommended Nutmeg for bad breath, headaches, and fever. Arabian writing mentions its uses as an aphrodisiac and stomach

medicine. Middle Eastern traders brought Nutmeg and mace to Southern Europe in the sixth century, and they were well known by the twelfth century from Italy to Denmark. The Portuguese found Nutmeg trees in the Molucca Islands, and dominated the Nutmeg and mace trade until the Dutch overcame it in 1602. Unaware that the spices came from one tree, one Dutch official ordered the Moluccan islanders to plant more mace trees, and fewer Nutmeg trees. Nutmeg production spread to the West Indies, Trinidad, and Grenada under the British in the 1800s.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

The sweet but slightly bitter flavor of Nutmeg adds character to vegetables. A little goes a long way so try 1/8 teaspoon per 4 servings to start. Just sprinkle it lightly over veal, fish, or chicken for a surprising snap. Use as a topping for whipped cream, custard, and eggnog. Ground Nutmeg is an ideal baking spice and is especially complimentary in sweet breads, cakes, muffins, cookies, and fruit pies.

Onion

General Description

The familiar and popular onion is a bulb of *Allium cepa*, a low growing plant. Botanists classify it in either the lily family or the amaryllis family.

Geographical Sources

Onions are grown worldwide, including the United States.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Onions are popular everywhere and are used as both a condiment and a vegetable in almost any savory food.

Taste and Aroma

Fresh onions are pungent and have a sharp bite. Cooked onions lose this heat and develop a rich sweetness.

History/Region of Origin

Onions have been grown since before recorded history. They were fed to workers building pyramids and were found in the tomb of King Tut. Onions are noted in the Bible as one of the foods most longed for by the Israelites after leaving Egypt for the Promised Land. They have been enjoyed by most cultures throughout history. Christopher Columbus brought Onions with him to the Americas. Their popularity quickly spread among native American cultures.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Use Onions in almost anything except sweets! Dried Onion can be added straight to liquids, but should be rehydrated before being added to drier dishes such as casseroles and stirfrys. Rehydrating them also increases potency. Onions make the perfect foundation for meats, poultry, soups, salads, and stews. Dried Onions release flavor more rapidly than freshly chopped Onions when added to a recipe.

Oregano

General Description

Mediterranean Oregano is the dried leaf of *Origanum vulgare* L., a perennial herb in the mint family. Mexican Oregano is the dried leaf of one of several plants of the *Lippia* genus.

Geographical Sources

Oregano is grown in California and New Mexico, as well as the Mediterranean region.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Oregano is the spice that gives pizza its characteristic flavor. It is also usually used in chili powder.

Taste and Aroma

Oregano has a pungent odor and flavor. Mexican Oregano is a bit stronger than Mediterranean Oregano.

History/Region of Origin

Mediterranean Oregano was originally grown extensively in Greece and Italy. Since Greek and Roman times it has been used with meats, fish, vegetables, and as a flavoring for wine. Before World War II, Oregano was almost unknown in the United States. However, its popularity skyrocketed with the popularity of pizza.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Oregano tastes great with tomato, egg, or cheese based foods, and is also a great addition to many lamb, pork, and beef main dishes. Try sauteeing aromatic vegetables in olive oil with garlic and Oregano. You can make a savory sauce with melted butter, lemon juice and a bit of Oregano; drizzle it over grilled fish and poultry. An easy way to accent pasta sauces, salad dressings, and ground meat dishes is with a dusting of crushed Oregano leaves. To

release its flavor, crush Oregano by hand or with a mortar and pestle before using it in your recipes.

Paprika

General Description

Paprika is a spice which comes from a mild red pepper in the family *Capsicum annum*. It is a brilliant red powder and often used as a garnish.

Geographical Sources

The peppers used in Paprika are grown in Hungary, Spain, South America, and California.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Paprika is the main flavor in Hungarian cooking, including dishes such as Goulash and Chicken Paprikash. In the United States, it is often used as a garnish on stuffed eggs, fish, and cheese and vegetable casseroles. Spanish Paprika flavors shellfish, rice, and sausage dishes. In Morocco, Paprika is used in tomato dishes and salads.

Taste and Aroma

Paprika ranges from sweet and mild to hot. American Paprika is the blandest, while Hungarian Paprika has the greatest range of flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Paprika, as a member of the capsicum family, is indigenous to the Western Hemisphere. The pepper is grown widely and takes on a slightly different flavor depending on local soil and climatic conditions.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Paprika is useful as a simple garnish for almost any savory dish. Combine it with butter, margarine, or oil for a quick baste for fish or poultry. This is especially good on roast turkey. Paprika can be mixed with bread crumbs before sprinkling them over casseroles or vegetables.

Parsley

General Description

Parsley is the dried leaf of *Petroselinum crispum*, a biennial in the parsley family.

Geographical Sources

Parsley is grown in California.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Parsley is most popular as a garnish and is an excellent breath freshener. It is high in vitamins A and C, and contains iron, iodine, and copper.

Taste and Aroma

Parsley has a light, fresh scent and flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Parsley was cultivated as early as the third century BC. The Romans used Parsley as a garnish and flavoring. They put it on their tables and around their necks in the belief the leaves would absorb fumes. Medieval Europeans believed that one could kill an enemy by plucking a sprig while speaking the person's name. It spread to the Americas in the 17th century, where it now grows plentifully. It is the most widely used culinary herb in the United States. Parsley is difficult to process because it takes twelve pounds of fresh Parsley to make one pound of dried. However, more people still use dried Parsley than fresh leaves as a garnish in soups, salads, meats, vegetables, and sauces.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Stretch homemade pesto and other green sauces by adding a generous amount of Parsley during mixing. Stir Parsley into melted garlic butter for a savory, yet simple, pasta or steamed vegetable topper. Add directly to liquids, cooked foods, melted butter, and salad dressings for a light spicy touch. Try a no salt herb blend by combining 1 tablespoon each Parsley Flakes, marjoram, and thyme. Crush Parsley in your hand or with a mortar and pestle before adding to food.

Pepper

General Description

Pepper is the dried berry of *Piper nigrum*. This vine which can grow up to ten feet tall is indigenous to India and Asia. Pepper is actually berries that are picked about nine months after flowering. (This is true pepper, and should not be confused with paprika, cayenne pepper, chili pepper, red pepper, and bell pepper, which are fruits from the capiscum family.) Black Pepper, the spiciest, is berries that are picked unripe. The berries used for White Pepper are ripened on the vine and soaked so that their outer hulls are easily removed. Green Peppercorns are immature berries which are freeze-dried or packed in brine for preservation.

Geographical Sources

Pepper is grown in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brazil.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Pepper is a universal table condiment used to flavor all types of dishes in cuisines worldwide. It's commonly used in stocks, pickling, and sausages.

Taste and Aroma

Black Pepper has a sharp, pungent aroma and flavor. White Pepper is hotter, less subtle and mildly fermented. Green Peppercorn is milder in flavor and has a fresh taste.

History/Region of Origin

Since the Roman times, Pepper has been the most important spice. The cities of Alexandria, Genoa, and Venice owed their economic success to Pepper. Three thousand year old Sanskrit literature mentions Pepper. It was one of the earliest items traded Asia and Europe. In 1101, victorious Genoese soldiers were each given two pounds of Pepper as a gift for their successful Palestinian conquest. In the Middle Ages, Europeans often used Pepper to pay rent, dowries, and taxes, and Shakespeare mentions Pepper in his plays. The need for Pepper inspired Spanish exploration and spice trade in the 15th century.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Coarsely crack Whole Peppercorns with side of a wide chef's knife and rub on to steaks and chops. Create a unique flavor depth in spice cakes, gingerbreads, and ginger cookies with a pinch of finely ground Black Pepper. Use Black Pepper to spark barbecue sauces, meat marinades, and vegetable stirfries. Sprinkle over chowders, cream soups, and tomato and egg dishes. Mix with sour cream or yogurt for a lively baked potato or vegetable topper. Add Whole Black Peppercorns to soups and stews, and the liquid used to poach seafood, meat, and poultry. Simmer Whole Black Peppercorns in fresh fruit compotes for a delicate, warm spiciness.

Poppy Seeds

General Description

Poppy Seeds are tiny nutty tasting, blue-gray seeds inside capsules on *Papaver somniferum*, a yellowish brown opium plant indigenous to the Mediterranean.

Geographical Sources

Poppies are native to Mediterranean regions, India, China, Turkey, and Iran. Today, Holland and Canada are the main producers of poppy seeds.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Poppy Seeds are used to flavor breads, cakes, rolls, and cookies in European and Middle Eastern cooking. In Turkey, they are often ground and used in desserts. In India, the seeds are ground and used to thicken sauces. The seeds are also used in noodle, fish, and vegetable dishes in Jewish, German, and Slavic cooking.

Taste and Aroma

Poppy Seeds have a slightly nutty aroma and taste.

History/Region of Origin

Since antiquity, poppies have symbolized honor. Women in second century Crete cultivated poppy plants for opium and Hippocrates suggested opium in medicine. Islamic and Arabian countries used opium as a medicine and narcotic in the sixth century. By the 17th century, Asians used the poppy plant as an opiate. Europeans began trafficking the drug in the 19th century, culminating in the Opium Wars, in which China lost control of the industry. The Greeks used the seeds as flavoring for breads in the second century, and medieval Europeans used them as a condiment with breads.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Poppy Seeds are a classic addition to buttered egg noodles, fruit salad dressings, and fragrant yeast breads. Poppy Seeds add nutty flavor and texture to cookies, cakes, breads, strudels, pastry crusts, and pancake and waffle batters.

Red Pepper

General Description

Red Pepper is made from the ground fruit of a plant in the Capsicum family. The fruits, commonly known as "chilies" or "chili peppers," are fiery red or orange pods which rarely grow to more than 4 inches in length. The ground product ranges from orange-red, to deep, dark red. According to the American Spice Trade Association, "Red Pepper" is the preferred name for all hot red pepper spices. Cayenne Pepper is another name for the same type of product. Some manufacturers use the term Cayenne Pepper to refer to a hotter version of Red Pepper.

Geographical Sources

China, Japan, India, Mexico, Africa, and Louisiana

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Red Pepper is used to achieve the characteristically hot flavor of Mexican, Creole, Cajun, Thai, Szechuan, and Indian cooking. It also is used in chili, Spanish rice, and barbecue sauce as well as meats, salads, and casseroles.

Taste and Aroma

Red pepper is a pungent, hot powder with a strong bite.

History/Region of Origin

Capsicum peppers are native to Mexico, Central America, the West Indies, and parts of South America. The Spanish discovered the pods in the New World and brought them back to Europe. Before the arrival of Spaniards, Indians in Peru and Guatemala used capsicum medicinally to treat stomach and other ailments.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Use small amounts of Red Pepper. It is a biting condiment, and the flavor intensifies as it is cooked. For a spicy snack, add ground Red Pepper and salt to hot oil; saute blanched almonds until golden. Or add a dash of Red Pepper, onion, cheese, and bacon to beaten eggs for scrambled eggs or omelet. Try adding Red Pepper to barbecue steak sauce. Use it to marinate or baste steaks.

Rosemary

General Description

Rosemary is an herb in the mint family. It is a small evergreen shrub, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, whose 1-inch leaves resemble curved pine needles.

Geographical Sources

Rosemary is native to the Mediterranean. Today it is widely produced in France, Spain, and Portugal.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Rosemary is used primarily in Italy in lamb, pork, chicken, and rabbit dishes.

Taste and Aroma

Rosemary has a tealike aroma and a piney flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Rosemary's name is rooted in legend. The story goes that during her flight from Egypt, the Virgin Mary draped her blue cloak on a Rosemary bush. She then laid a white flower on top of the cloak. That night, the flower turned blue and the bush was thereafter known as the "rose of Mary". Greeks, who wove Rosemary wreaths into their hair, believed Rosemary strengthened the brain and enhanced memory. It was also known as a symbol of fidelity. In the Middle Ages, Rosemary was used medicinally and as a condiment for salted meats. In Europe, wedding parties burned Rosemary as incense. Judges burned it to protect against illness brought in by prisoners.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Rosemary's assertive flavor blends well with garlic to season lamb roasts, meat stews, and marinades. Rosemary also enlivens lighter fish dishes, tomato sauces, and vegetables. Melt butter with Rosemary to dress freshly steamed red potatoes and peas or a stirfried mixture of zucchini and summer squash. Crush leaves by hand or with a mortar and pestle before using.

Saffron

General Description

Saffron is the stigma of *Crocus sativus*, a flowering plant in the crocus family. Saffron, the world's most expensive

spice, is costly because more than 225,000 stigmas must be hand picked to produce one pound. In its pure form, saffron is a mass of compressed, threadlike, dark orange strands.

Geographical Sources

Saffron is native to the Mediterranean. Today it is cultivated primarily in Spain.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Saffron is used in French bouillabaisse, Spanish paella, Milanese risotto, and many Middle Eastern dishes.

Taste and Aroma

Saffron has a spicy, pungent, and bitter flavor with a sharp and penetrating odor.

History/Region of Origin

Ancient Greeks and Romans scattered Saffron to perfume public baths. The 13th century Crusaders brought Saffron from Asia to Europe, where it was used as a dye and condiment. In Asia, Saffron was a symbol of hospitality. In India, people used Saffron to mark themselves as members of a wealthy caste.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

A little pinch goes a long way with Saffron. Use it in Italian risottos, Spanish chicken and rice, French seafood stews and Scandinavian sweet breads.

Sage

General Description

Sage is an herb from an evergreen shrub, *Salvia officinalis*, in the mint family. Its long, grayish green leaves take on a velvety, cotton like texture when rubbed (meaning ground lightly and passed through a coarse sieve).

Geographical Sources

Sage is grown in the United States. It also is grown in Dalmatia and Albania.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Sage enhances pork, lamb, meats, and sausages. Chopped leaves flavor salads, pickles, and cheese. It is one of the most popular herbs in the United States.

Taste and Aroma

Sage has a fragrant aroma and an astringent but warm flavor.

History/Region of Origin

The name "Sage" comes from the Latin word "salvia," meaning "to save." Greeks and Romans used it to cure snake bites and to invigorate the mind and body. In the Middle Ages, people drank Sage in tea and used Sage to treat colds, fevers, liver trouble, and epilepsy. Although Sage is no longer used medicinally, it has become one of the world's most popular herbs.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Crumble leaves for full fragrance. Use ground Sage sparingly; foods absorb its flavor more quickly than leaf Sage. Sage is a wonderful flavor enhancer for seafood, vegetables, breadsticks, cornbreads, muffins, and other savory breads. Top swordfish, tuna, steaks, chicken, and turkey pieces with Sage lemon butter. Rub Sage, cracked pepper, and garlic into pork tenderloin or chops before cooking.

Sesame Seed

General Description

Sesame Seed is the seed of an annual herb, *Sesamum indicum*, which grows well in hot climates. Sesame Seed is the most commonly produced seed. The yellowish, red, or black seeds are used in bread products, stir-fries, Jewish and Chinese confectionaries, and Middle Eastern dishes.

Geographical Sources

Africa and Indonesia

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Sesame Seed has been enjoyed by humans since the dawn of civilization. It is used in breads, candies, main dishes, as a garnish on pasta and vegetables, and for its oil content.

Taste and Aroma

Sesame Seeds have a nut-like, mild flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Sesame Seed is probably the oldest crop grown for its taste, dating back 2000 years to China. The Egyptians used Sesame Seed as medicine around the same time. The Turks used its oil in 900 BC. The term “open sesame” first appeared in the Arabian book "The Thousand and One Nights." The phrase refers to the seeds' ability to pop, at the slightest touch, when ripe. Sesame was imported from India to Europe during the first century. Persians used sesame oil because they had no olive oil. Africans, who called it “benne,” brought it with them to the United States in the 17th century during the slave trade.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Sesame Seeds are easy to toast. Place them in a pan and stir over medium heat for a minute or two until they brown lightly. Add Sesame Seeds to cookie doughs, pie pastry, and yeast breads. Sprinkle over creamed spinach, buttered noodles, eggplant dishes, and mixed vegetable stir-fries. Blend with butter or mayonnaise to make a nutty spread for chicken, turkey, or tuna sandwiches.

Summer Savory

General Description

Savory is an annual herb, *Satureja hotenis*, belonging to the mint family. Its dark-green, narrow leaves are dried and crushed.

Geographical Sources

United States and Yugoslavia

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Savory enhances almost any savory dish. It goes well with soups, stews, bean dishes of any sort, succotash, cabbage, and sauerkraut.

Taste and Aroma

Savory has a clean, piney fragrance and peppery flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Romans used Savory as an herb and seasoning even before they used pepper. They used it as a medicine, a bee sting treatment, and an aphrodisiac. When the Romans brought it to England, it was used as an ingredient in stuffing rather than as an herbal remedy.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Spark heavy stews, soups, and chowders with a garnish of Summer Savory. Top chilled, poached fish or chicken with a blend of Savory, chives, lemon juice, and mayonnaise. Crush Savory in your hand or with a mortar and pestle before use to release the flavor.

Tarragon

General Description

Tarragon is a small, shrubby herb, *Artemisia dracunculus*, in the sunflower family. Two species are cultivated, Russian and French. Leaves of the French variety are glossier and more pungent. Most commercial Tarragon comes from dried leaves of the French Tarragon plant.

Geographical Sources

Tarragon is native to southern Russia and western Asia. Today, its primary producer is France.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Tarragon is commonly known as a flavoring for vinegar and is used in pickles, relishes, prepared mustards, and sauces. Tarragon also goes well with fish, meat, soups and stews, and is often used in tomato and egg dishes. Tarragon adds distinctive flavor to sauces.

Taste and Aroma

Tarragon has a slightly bittersweet flavor and an aroma similar to anise.

History/Region of Origin

Tarragon, unlike many other herbs, was not used by ancient peoples. It was mentioned briefly in medieval writings as a pharmaceutical, but did not come into common use until the 16th century in England. It was brought to the United States in the early 19th century.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Tarragon adds flavor to egg and cheese dishes, light soups and fresh fruits. To baste chicken, fish or seafood, blend Tarragon with butter, chives, and lemon.

Thyme

General Description

Thyme is the leaf of a low-growing shrub in the mint family called *Thymus vulgaris*. Its tiny grayish-green leaves rarely are greater than one-fourth inch long. For use as a condiment, Thyme leaves are dried then chopped, or ground.

Geographical Sources

Thyme is grown in southern Europe, including France, Spain, and Portugal. It is also indigenous to the Mediterranean.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Thyme is often included in seasoning blends for poultry and stuffing and also commonly used in fish sauces, chowders, and soups. It goes well with lamb and veal as well as in eggs, custards, and croquettes. Thyme often is paired with tomatoes.

Taste and Aroma

Thyme has a subtle, dry aroma and a slightly minty flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Ancient Greeks considered Thyme a symbol of courage and sacrifice. Tradition tells that Thyme was in the straw bed of the Virgin Mary and the Christ child. In the Middle Ages, ladies would embroider a sprig of Thyme into scarves they gave to their errant knights. At various periods in history, Thyme has been used to treat melancholy, reproductive system ailments, and to improve digestion. In the 18th century, it was recommended as a cure for a hangover.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Rub minced garlic and Thyme over lamb, pork, or beef roasts. Season cheese, tomato, and egg dishes with Thyme. Blend fragrant Thyme into poultry stuffing, spaghetti or pizza sauce, and chili along with any combination of marjoram, basil, oregano, sage, rosemary, or garlic.

Turmeric

General Description

Turmeric comes from the root of *Curcuma longa*, a leafy plant in the ginger family. The root, or rhizome, has a tough brown skin and bright orange flesh. Ground Turmeric comes from fingers which extend from the root. It is boiled or steamed and then dried, and ground.

Geographical Sources

India is the world's primary producer of Turmeric. It is also grown in China and Indonesia.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Turmeric is a necessary ingredient of curry powder. It is used extensively in Indian dishes, including lentil and meat dishes, and in Southeast Asian cooking. Turmeric is routinely added to mustard blends and relishes. It also is used in place of saffron to provide color and flavor.

Taste and Aroma

Turmeric is mildly aromatic and has scents of orange or ginger. It has a pungent, bitter flavor.

History/Region of Origin

Turmeric, with its brilliant yellow color, has been used as a dye, medicine, and flavoring since 600 BC. In 1280, Marco Polo described Turmeric as "a vegetable with the properties of saffron, yet it is not really saffron." Indonesians used Turmeric to dye their bodies as part of their wedding ritual. Turmeric has been used medicinally throughout Asia to treat stomach and liver ailments. It also was used externally, to heal sores, and as a cosmetic.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

Because of its bitter taste, Turmeric should not be used as a flavor substitute for saffron. A Turmeric stain can be washed out with soap and water if treated quickly. Use Turmeric to add Eastern mystery to new favorites as well as in traditional curries, rice and chicken dishes, and condiments. Turmeric is a classic addition to chutneys, pickles, and relishes. Add a pinch of Turmeric to fish soups. Blend with melted butter and drizzle over cooked vegetables, pasta, or potatoes.

Vanilla

General Description

Vanilla Beans are the long, greenish-yellow seed pods of the tropical orchid plant, *Vanilla planifolia*. Before the plant flowers, the pods are picked, unripe, and cured until they're dark brown. The process takes up to six months. To obtain Pure Vanilla Extract, cured Vanilla Beans are steeped in alcohol. According to law, Pure Vanilla Extract must be 35 percent alcohol by volume.

Geographical Sources

Vanilla beans are grown in Madagascar, Mexico, Indonesia, and Tahiti.

Traditional Ethnic Uses

Vanilla is one of the most popular flavorings in the world. It is used in flavoring most desserts, including ice cream, custard, cake, candy, and pudding. Vanilla is also used to enhance the flavor of beverages and sauces.

Taste and Aroma

Vanilla Beans have a sweet, perfumed aroma with a woody or smoky flavor. Pure Vanilla Extract has a similar aroma.

History/Region of Origin

Vanilla originated in Mexico, where the Aztecs used it to accent the flavor of chocolate drinks. The Mexican emperor, Montezuma, introduced Vanilla to the Spanish explorer Cortez, who brought it to Europe in the 16th century. The drink, made with Vanilla pods and cacao beans, became popular among the aristocracy in Europe. In 1602, a chemist for Queen Elizabeth I suggested that Vanilla could be used alone as a flavoring.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started

One inch of Vanilla Bean is equal to one teaspoon of Pure Vanilla Extract. Vanilla Beans should never be refrigerated because they may develop mold when chilled. They should be kept in an air-tight container at room temperature. Add to desserts or beverages to boost sweet, fruity, or rich flavors. Provides smooth rich background taste - use to balance sauces for shellfish, chicken, and veal. Softens dairy flavors and reduces egginess in French toast and meringues. Add to a mug of hot chocolate, coffee, or tea for added richness.

And a fantastic link about Herbs and Spices:

<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/foods/348-907/348-907.pdf>