



The Ultimate **GUIDE TO COOKING WITH SPICES**



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WELCOME, SPICY FRIEND

I'm so glad you're here! If you're like most people, at some point you will have bought several interesting looking jars of spices or spice blends that now sit in your kitchen cupboard or on your shelf, unused and maybe even unopened.

Inspired perhaps by a recipe in a magazine or cookbook, you headed out to the shops – full of enthusiasm – and spent a small fortune on well or lesser-known spices or blends that, six months on, you haven't a clue what to do with.

Perhaps you had decided to expand your cooking repertoire, or maybe you bought the ingredients to impress your friends or family with a knockout meal or feast for a gathering. Unfortunately, those lovely ingredients got relegated to the depths of your cupboard and will likely lose their fragrance and flavoursome punch before you get around to using them again.

Buy any book on cooking with spices, and you will find huge lists of expensive ingredients that are required to make even the most basic of weekday meals, together with lengthy step-by-step guides on how to create 'authentic' results. Pick up another book, and you'll find equally complicated advice about how to make traditional classics, some of which might directly contradict the guidance you read in the first place.

The keen home cook or aspiring spice newbie faces a bewildering array of choices and information – together with long and expensive shopping lists – all coming from authoritative and credible sources.

All of this means that, sooner or later, you are likely to realise that cooking with spices is perceived to be complicated and that some kind of special or ancestral knowledge – or even wizardry – is required before any food even touches a pan!



It would be completely understandable if you were left feeling out of your depth, and that cooking with spices is something that you should just leave to the 'experts'.

What to do? Is there one book or approach that represents the true tenet when it comes to cooking with spices? Choose rightly, and you will be sure to cook with spicy aplomb forevermore? Choose wrongly, and you will commit a serious social faux pas and lose all credibility with your guests and, even worse, insult centuries of authentic home cooks?

Hearing this dilemma over and over, and after decades of listening to people talk about authenticity, I have decided to share something radically different: an approach to cooking with spices that I have relied on since learning to cook. And it's so simple that it almost doesn't warrant the term radical.

What do I do?

Instead of trusting in outside authorities, I simply trust my own tastebuds, no matter what or where it leads. This way of cooking opens up whole realms of inspiration and discovery about the variety of incredible dishes that can be created using simple spice blends.

Most importantly this way of cooking can liberate you and help you to trust in your own palette. It is joyful and creative, and it frees you up to create your own family favourites.

In this little guide, I am going to share with you some simple tips for cooking with spices that you can use in your kitchen at home, quickly and easily. With this knowledge, you can make incredible, show stopping dishes again and again.

These recipes will work interchangeably with several of the blends, meaning one soup, stew, tagine or curry can be cooked in a multitude of ways and yield many flavoursome results. Armed with this basic guidance – the kitchen is your proverbial oyster. You are completely free to explore as your tastebuds guide. There is no right or wrong, no holy grail of authenticity to aspire – and fail to – achieve.

Only what you and your family or friends enjoy.

My mission is to help you enjoy the uninhibited pleasure of cooking with spices, accompanied by the knowledge that you aren't going to get it wrong. I want you to feel excited to cook and to feel liberated from the chains of that dreaded authenticity. If your body and your tastebuds respond positively to garam masala in your Shakshuka instead of just cumin, then who am I to tell you not to go with that? There are literally no surly ancestors waiting to turn in their graves if you follow what you love. In fact, I'd wager that they are more likely to cheer you on.

The purpose of this little guide is to introduce you to an even higher authority on spices than even the most revered grandmother or aunt, and that authority is you.

Go be free.

Sanjayx

First things first...

WHAT EXACTLY IS 'SPICE'?



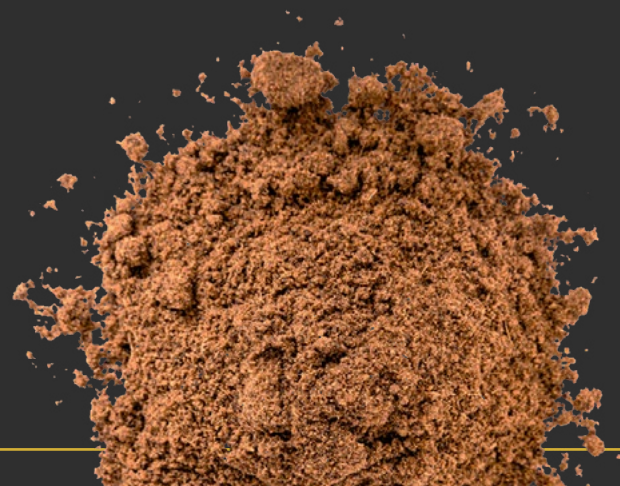
The common misconception is that spice equals 'heat', but actually this isn't true. Spice is about flavour. Think about cardamom or turmeric, both are spices but they aren't going to blow your head off! I think this is a source of much misunderstanding when people say that they don't like spicy food – they are automatically thinking about warmth or heat from chilli rather than the incredible range of flavours that can brighten up their dishes.

Spice can bring earthiness, richness, citrus notes or warmth to your recipes. Spices can add depth or flavour, colour, and of course, that incredible smell that will fill your home and get your belly excited. So, if you don't like chilli, no problem, there is still plenty of opportunity in the world of spice for you to explore.

What you need to know about cooking with spices

Our customers are always asking what the secret is to cooking with spices. And the first thing I want to say is there is not just one, overall, best-kept secret...

There is so much mystery surrounding cooking with spice, and I want to challenge that. There is no doubt that a little knowledge about getting the most out of your spices will greatly enhance the flavour of your dishes. It is a lot easier than you think!



THE POWER OF SPICE BLENDS



A simple spoonful of spice blend can instantly transform even the most mundane of dishes: think Za'atar rubbed on your chicken legs before roasting or even some sweet smoked paprika on your potatoes wedges! The possibilities are endless.

In my home, I'm a massive fan of cooking with spice blends rather than single spices. Firstly, because they are already mixed to include different and complementary flavours, but also because they will save you bags of time. Because I have a young daughter, I tend to use spice blends that are suitable for children, meaning they are free from salt, sugar and chilli. Over the years I've learned to cook a meal – whether it's a soup, stew, curry or pie – using the gentle blends, take out a portion for Zara, and then spice up what's left for me and my wife. It's a great way to cook, as Zara gets to eat the same as us and it saves lots of time in an evening as I'm only cooking one meal.

What's more, spice blends are so easily interchangeable. So I will cook say a roast cauliflower using Baharat one week but then a few weeks later cook it using Bebere or Tandoori Masala. By mixing up the blend, and then serving different dips or pickles on the side, you can introduce huge variety and creativity using the same basic ingredients.

If you're cooking a curry, it is crucial that you either temper or roast your spices to transform their flavour and improve your meals. This is a step which shouldn't be missed, so if it's stated in the recipe, make sure you follow every instruction!



ROASTING AND TEMPERING SPICES



Toasting your whole spices at the start of your cooking isn't just a fun thing to do, it's 100% essential to the success of your dish. This is because the frying releases the essential oils locked into the spice, which won't get released in the usual cooking process. You are missing out on some serious flavour if you skip this step.

You won't be sorry you put in the extra effort. Pinky promise!

Tempering involves letting your spices sizzle in hot oil for about 30 seconds right at the start of your cooking. It can take a bit of practice to get it right and definitely take extra care not to burn them. We suggest you keep a watchful eye over the tempering process and don't try and do two things at once! Burnt spices don't equal good flavour.

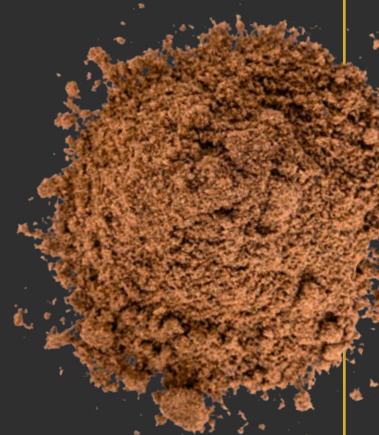


KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO TAKE YOUR TIME



I'm a massive advocate for time saving, hacks and shortcuts wherever possible. But there are some instances where taking your time is going to be important. Think stews or dishes where meat needs to become tender over a period of time. Although cooking with spice does not need to take all day, your dishes will be even more delicious should you allow the flavours time to develop.

Some spices such as cumin, turmeric and coriander are quite pungent in taste and can therefore leave your dishes tasting a little metallic. The trick is to use them earlier on in the cooking rather than add at the end so that their flavours have time to develop. If a recipe calls for a longer cooking time, there will be a very good reason. So, don't skip those steps. Simmering your dish in a pan for that little bit longer or slow cooking in your oven for a few hours will only make everything taste better, and your future self will thank you for your patience.



SPICES CAN BE CONDIMENTS TOO



I want you to become as confident in cooking with spices as you are using salt and black pepper, and so it can actually be helpful to see spices in the same way. After all, salt and pepper are actually spices!

From a hint of sweetness to a kick of heat: spices can also be used as condiments as well as in your cooking. So if you want to turn up the heat simply add a sprinkle of chilli on top or a pinch of paprika to your cooked dish for an extra kick. Likewise, adding a dusting of cinnamon or cloves to your porridge can transform a humble breakfast. You know how you like it!

The BEST meals always have spice

It's a bit of a joke in my family, but, when I was growing up and we ate out in restaurants, I used to smuggle in a bag of spice in my pocket to add extra flavour to whatever I was eating. Because of my upbringing, food isn't food without spice, whether that's heat or a warming hit of cinnamon.

Experiment and have fun. Cooking with spices can enhance the colour of your dishes, introducing depth and excitement to your plate. And remember, spices can take you around the world without having to leave your kitchen.



STORE-CUPBOARD ESSENTIALS



The benefits of a fully stocked store cupboard cannot be overstated. That said, the way you stock your cupboard depends largely on the types of dishes you want to make. It would be unrealistic to suggest we can prepare you for every eventuality, but, in addition to your spices and spice blends it's great to be armed with:

- Black pepper – for me it's peppercorns all the way, rather than the pre-ground version.
- Canned chickpeas and kidney beans – great for homemade hummus but also perfect for making a curry when you don't have time to soak dried peas and beans overnight.
- Canned tomatoes – the basis of so many dishes. I tend to go for good-quality plum tomatoes but chopped work equally well.
- Coconut milk – I always go for full-fat but using reduced-fat is OK. A stock of coconut milk will mean you can easily knock up a super-tasty curry in no time at all.
- Cornflour (cornstarch) – great for quickly thickening up sauces and also for coating ingredients such as tofu or chicken breasts.
- Oils – it's worth having several in your cupboard. I always make sure I have good-quality olive oil, extra virgin olive oil, sunflower, vegetable and rapeseed oil. Many of the recipes in this book use sunflower or vegetable oil so if you buy a big bottle it will serve you well.



STORE-CUPBOARD ESSENTIALS



- Flour – I use a lot of self-raising (self-rising) flour, especially to make quick and easy midweek naan bread. I also keep a good stash of '00' flour, plain, and strong bread flour.
- Honey – a simple drizzle transforms a lowly baked feta into the stuff of dreams. Honey is non-negotiable on this list!
- Lemon and lime juice – literally life-changing! It's so frustrating to have all the ingredients for a recipe and then find out you're missing a lemon or lime. Get yourself some in a bottle and never go short again.
- Lentils – most supermarkets now sell black urad lentils, which you need for dals; do also pick up some split chickpeas (chana dal) and red lentils for soups and stews generally.
- Noodles – egg or rice noodles are fine, we're also fans of udon noodles, which are great for vegans.
- Nuts, seeds and dried fruits – where you can, grab sesame, nigella and onion seeds, as well as dried fruits such as dates, prunes and apricots.
- Passata (strained tomatoes) – I use bottles and bottles of passata for the same reason as canned tomatoes: they are the bedrock of so many dishes and a really great way to quickly knock up a sauce.
- Rice – choose good-quality basmati rice to accompany your curries and stir fries.
- Salt – my preference is always to go for flaky sea salt because it can add great texture when crunched over dishes.
- Sugar – despite the health warnings, sometimes only a spoonful of sugar will do. White, granulated sugar is fine though. If you prefer brown then just stock up on what you prefer.
- Tacos and tortillas – these last for ages and so it's worth picking them up when you're at the shops and saving them for a rainy day.



EQUIPMENT THAT WILL MAKE YOUR LIFE EASIER!



You don't need to invest in loads of fancy equipment to make amazing meals with spices, but there are some basic kitchen gadgets and utensils that are going to make your life so much easier. You don't have to spend a fortune either – do try one of the online auction sites for some great pre-loved bargains. Here's a quick overview of what to look out for.

- **Baking trays** (sheets) A couple of decent-sized baking trays will serve you well. I always try to line mine with baking paper to prevent ingredients from sticking and also to help with the washing- up mission at the end of the meal!
- **Cake tin** (cake pan) A decent cake tin for making tarts is always useful to have. Try to go for one around 20cm (8in) diameter and if you can, choose a tin with a loose bottom to make removing tarts and cakes easier.
- **Clean jars** for storing spice blends, pickles and dips. It makes life so much easier if you have a stash of clean jars ready to use. Go for a variety of sizes but try to choose glass where possible so you can see what's inside! You can sterilize clean jars by rinsing them with boiling hot water and then drying them off in the oven at 120°C fan/140°C/275°F/gas mark 1 for 10 minutes, or in a microwave on high setting for 30–45 seconds.
- **Coffee grinder.** A weird inclusion in a guide about spices? Actually, no. A basic coffee grinder will become your best friend if you decide to go down the route of making your own spice blends. They are great for blitzing up whole spices, take much less effort than a pestle and mortar and will ensure a consistent texture for your spice blends.
- **Heavy-bottomed frying pans** (skillets) and saucepans with well-fitting (glass) lids. It's key for so many recipes that you have at least one, if not two, pans that have a decent base and a tight-fitting lid. Ingredients are less likely to stick or burn and everything just cooks – and therefore tastes – so much better.
- **Ice-cream scoop** Simply because everyone needs an ice-cream scoop in their lives!

EQUIPMENT THAT WILL MAKE YOUR LIFE EASIER!



- **Ice-cube trays.** Get yourself a good stash of these for freezing ginger-garlic paste, sauces, herbs and much more so that you have things ready prepared.
- **Labels.** Do ensure you label and date everything immediately, whether it's spice blends or sauces in freezer bags. It's so frustrating to make something and then not recognise it two months later!
- **Measuring jugs.** You'll be measuring out lots of liquids so have a decent measuring jug or two in your cupboard. I prefer glass because it cleans up better: plastic will tarnish and also the measuring lines tend to rub off with continued use.
- **Mixing bowls.** Aim for a range of sizes. I tend to use glass or ceramic as they are heat- and dishwasher-safe, but also because plastic bowls will pick up some of the colour from the spices and can look tired and old really quickly.
- **Pestle and mortar.** You can pick up second-hand pestle and mortars cheaply online. It's up to you what to go for but my advice would be to invest in a heavy one – ideally made of granite or stone – with a heavy pestle. The pestle has one job in life: to smash things up, so you want to find one that is really robust that you feel confident in.
- **Stick blender and food processor.** Both these gadgets make life so much easier when you're blending sauces or making pastes. Hand-held stick blenders are far cheaper and great for fine blending, however a food processor offers you so much more functionality, like shredding veggies, or making dough and pastry.
- **Tupperware.** For leftovers and freezing sauces and chutneys. Once you get into batch cooking and freezing ahead of time, you can never have enough, I promise. One trick I learned when buying Tupperware is to always buy the same containers because lids go missing! So if you have all of the same container in the same size, you'll never end up too short of lids. Also, for a cheaper option, save takeaway containers too, if they are decent quality.
- **Utensils Good-quality sharp knives** in a range of sizes, decent wooden spoons, teaspoons and tablespoons for measuring your spices are all going to come in handy.



THANK YOU!

I really hope you find this guide useful as you start your journey into cooking with spices. Please take a step, however small, and let me know how you get on. And if you make any of the recipes on our website (spicekitchenuk.com) then tag me in, as I'd love to see what you create!

Let's get cooking!

With love

Sanjayx

Co-founder and Chief Spice Officer

Spice Kitchen

IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFO CONTACT US

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