

# *Nature's 42 Best Herbs & Spices*



*By The Editors of FC&A Medical Publishing*

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*"Who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases."*

Psalms 103:3

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## Anise

This annual herb is native to the eastern Mediterranean but grows throughout the world. The whole anise seed — greenish-brown, curved, and less than a quarter-inch long — is harvested in the fall and used as a spice or distilled into an oil. With its licorice-like flavor, anise often perks up candy, gelatins, puddings, meats, and liqueurs, as well as throat lozenges and cough syrups. You'll also find its distinct fragrance in soap, creams, and perfumes.

As one of the oldest known spice plants, there's evidence it was used in Egypt at least 4,000 years ago to treat digestive problems and toothache. Even the Greeks wrote how they used anise to help breathing problems, relieve pain, stimulate urination, and ease thirst. In Europe, the Middle East, and India, anise is chewed after meals to encourage digestion and for fresher breath.

Researchers today are studying anise as a potential treatment for asthma and bronchitis.



### Spicy anise candy

- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 2 teaspoons anise extract

Combine first three ingredients in a large saucepan. Bring mixture to a boil, stirring occasionally. Cover and cook for a few minutes or until sugar is dissolved. Uncover and continue to cook, undisturbed, until candy thermometer reaches 300 degrees or the hard-crack stage. Add anise extract and food coloring, if desired. Pour into a 9-inch square buttered pan. Score slightly hardened candy into servings and break into pieces when completely hardened. Makes about 8 dozen pieces.



## Arrowroot

Arrowroot, also called obedience plant, is a large perennial herb grown for the powdered starch — also called arrowroot — obtained from the roots. This starch, which looks and feels like cornstarch, is used as a thickener in many foods like sauces and gravies, but it can also be used in baked goods. In fact, in some stores, you'll find it sold as arrowroot flour. Because it is practically tasteless and easily digested, arrowroot is helpful when you're feeling nauseous. It's a traditional remedy for diarrhea as well.

Europeans first experienced arrowroot in the West Indies, where the natives used the powder not only as a food but also as a poultice to draw toxins from wounds caused by poisoned arrows.

To use arrowroot as a thickener in your kitchen, mix it with a cool liquid before adding to hot liquids. Cook until thick.

Two teaspoons of arrowroot can be substituted for one tablespoon of cornstarch. One teaspoon of arrowroot can be substituted for one tablespoon of flour.



### Old-fashioned berry crisp

1 cup strawberries	1 cup raspberries
2 tablespoons lemon juice	1 teaspoon arrowroot flour
1/4 teaspoon ginger	

Topping:

1/4 cup flour	1/4 cup brown sugar
2 tablespoons cinnamon	1/4 cup frozen butter
1 cup oats	

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Toss fruit with arrowroot flour and ginger. Pour into greased 8-inch square pan. Combine topping ingredients in food processor or blender. Pulse until topping crumbles are pebble-size. Spoon over fruit. Bake for 25 minutes or until topping is browned. Allow dessert to cool for 15 minutes before serving.



## Basil

No Italian kitchen could be without basil. This popular culinary herb, sometimes called sweet basil, is the main ingredient in pesto, a traditional Italian sauce. Surprisingly, basil is not a native of Italy — it's originally from India and other tropical Asian regions, having been cultivated there for more than 5,000 years. That's why you'll also find it playing a major role in the cuisines of Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia. As a tropical plant, basil is sensitive to cold weather, and gardeners usually treat the most common varieties of basil as annuals or grow them in pots so they can be brought indoors during the winter.

There's not a lot of scientific evidence confirming basil's use as a medicinal herb just yet, but cultures around the world insist it has antiviral and antibacterial properties. In fact, one common folk remedy is to massage folded basil leaves against the teeth to treat dental ailments. In addition, basil is thought to ease headaches, nervous tension, upset stomachs, nausea, sore throats, and coughs. Try sipping a cup of warm basil tea — made with chopped leaves and boiling water.



### Fresh basil pesto

- 3 cups fresh basil, packed
- 3/4 cup olive oil
- 1/3 cup pine nuts
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- salt and pepper, to taste

Combine the basil, pine nuts, and garlic in a food processor or blender and pulse for a few seconds. Slowly pour the olive oil into the food processor while it is running. Stop and occasionally scrape the sides of the container to ensure a smooth, paste-like consistency. Add salt and pepper to taste.



## Bay leaf

The next time you win a race, write a poem, or pass a test, grab a bay leaf. Not only will you be displaying an ancient symbol of glory, but you'll be ready to season that pot of stew for dinner.

The bay laurel tree, from which the bay leaf comes, has been cultivated since the beginning of recorded history. Its leaves were trophies for ancient Greek and Roman heroes and denoted honor in various mythologies.

Today, it is primarily used to flavor foods, as in a bouquet garni, and is used by chefs of ethnic cuisines, from French to Italian to Thai. It is also frequently used in salt-free seasonings.

The bay leaves you buy in your supermarket are probably Turkish — and that's a good thing. Compared to California bay leaves, the Turkish variety have a milder, less astringent flavor, and are generally preferred in cooking.

Most recipes call for one or two whole bay leaves, which will impart a minty or clove-like flavor to your dish. But remove the leaves before serving — you'll still get the benefit of its vitamins and minerals without suffering any digestive problems.



### White beans with bay leaves

- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 whole bay leaves
- 1 16-oz can whole tomatoes, chopped  
(or 1 16-oz can diced tomatoes)
- 1 1-lb can white kidney beans (cannellini), drained

Sauté onion in oil until translucent. Add tomatoes with some of the liquid and bay leaves. Cook over medium heat for 15 minutes. Drain the beans and add them to the mixture. Cook for another 15 minutes on low heat. Serves four as a side dish.



## Black pepper

Variety may be the spice of life, but black pepper is the spice of choice. Perhaps the most popular seasoning in the world, pepper has acted throughout history to not only pep up food, but serve as currency as well.

Peppercorns, whether they are black, white, green, or red, are preserved berries or seeds of the *Piper nigrum* plant, a native perennial vine of India, that is now commercially grown in eastern Asia, Borneo, Brazil, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the West Indies. The color of the berries depends on how mature they are at harvest and the type of processing they go through. No matter the color, they all contain piperine, a naturally occurring chemical that gives pepper its heat.

In addition to spicing up your life, black pepper has also been used traditionally to treat diarrhea, and it is being studied as a remedy for pain and perhaps Alzheimer's disease.



### Black pepper and garlic bread crumbs

2 tablespoons olive oil                      1/4 teaspoon sea salt  
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder              1/2 teaspoon peppercorns  
1 sourdough baguette, 2-3 days old, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

To crack the peppercorns, place in a zippered plastic storage bag and seal. Using the flat side of a meat mallet, crush them until you have a coarse powder.

Place bread cubes in a food processor or blender and pulse until you get the desired size.

Heat oven to 325 degrees. Mix crumbs, oil, salt, garlic, and pepper until well-blended. Spread on a baking sheet in a single layer. Put baking sheet on the lower rack in the oven. Bake for about 10 minutes or until golden brown, stirring once.



## Black seed

Black seed — also known as black cumin — may be the most potent herbal remedy you've never heard of. Botanically known as *Nigella sativa*, this annual flowering plant is native to southwest Asia and the Middle East. It's been a part of culinary and medicinal history since ancient Egypt. In fact, a bottle of black seed oil was found in the tomb of King Tutankhamun.

The tiny seeds have a slightly bitter, spicy taste and are often used as a substitute for black pepper and caraway seeds.

Folk remedies include taking black seed to aid digestion and treat colds, headaches, toothaches, infections, inflammatory disorders, and allergies. Many of these claims are now supported by modern research. In addition, scientists today have discovered a compound in black seed, called thymoquinone, that may have potential anti-cancer properties.



### Black seed flatbreads

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 3 cups all purpose flour                   | 1 cup ice water      |
| 3 tablespoons olive oil                    | 2 teaspoons salt     |
| 2 teaspoons baking powder                  | pinch of baking soda |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons nigella seeds (black seed) |                      |

Combine all ingredients in a bowl and form dough into a ball. Divide the dough into equal parts. If you divide it into four pieces, it will make four 8-inch flatbreads. If you want smaller flatbreads, divide the dough into more pieces. Roll out each section of dough to a thin layer. Oil and then heat a griddle or frying pan. When hot, place rolled-out dough on the griddle. Flip bread after one side begins to darken. The flatbreads cook quickly so don't leave them cooking unattended.



## Caraway seeds

You may call them caraway seeds, but these small, crescent-shaped pods are actually the fruit of the caraway plant — although each one does contain a single seed. You'll find them in rye bread, many popular German dishes like sauerkraut, and as an ingredient in tabil, an Arabic spice mixture. Caraway seeds are a fairly mineral-rich spice, so experiment with adding them to your own recipes, where they will add a mild, licorice-like flavor.

Historically, caraway was used to relieve gas, and today, the seeds and oil are recommended to treat a variety of gastrointestinal problems. In fact, caraway is an ingredient in the product Iberogast, a combination of eight different herbs used for a number of stomach disorders. In addition, scientists are interested in caraway to treat asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, acid reflux, and the ulcer-causing bacteria *Helicobacter pylori*.

The caraway is a shrub, native to Northern Africa, Europe, and Asia, but you can plant it in your own garden. Keep in mind you probably won't be able to harvest seeds until the second season.



### Caraway oil

3 cups canola or olive oil

1/4 cup ground caraway seeds

Combine oil and caraway seeds in a glass bowl or container. Cover loosely and allow to steep for three days in a cool, dry environment. Strain oil through thick cheesecloth and discard the caraway sediment. Refrigerate flavored oil and use within one month.



## Cardamom

Cardamom is the dried, unripened fruit of the perennial herb *Elettaria cardamomum*, a member of the ginger family and a native of India, Burma, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Described as having a spicy, floral flavor, cardamom is sold as whole pods — either green or white — or ground. When green, the pods are in their natural state, while white pods have been bleached. Many cooks claim the bleached pods are bland and not worth the extra cost. Since cardamom in any form is fairly expensive, you could save a little money by buying the cheaper green pods.

You'll most likely find cardamom in recipes for baked goods and sweets, and even served in coffee. If your recipe calls for 10 whole cardamom pods, you can substitute about 1 1/2 teaspoons of ground cardamom.

Since ancient times, it has been used to aid digestion, but folk remedies claim cardamom can also treat teeth and gum infections, prevent throat troubles, clear congestion in the lungs, eliminate foodborne bacteria, and relieve stress. Scientists are studying cardamom in the hopes it could help control inflammation, boost the immune system, and even fight cancer.

You can make cardamom tea by steeping 1 teaspoon of freshly crushed cardamom seeds in a cup of boiled water for 10 to 15 minutes.



### Fruit and herb topping

- 1 1/4 cups fresh fruit, such as berries, oranges, or grapes
- 1/4 cup honey or light corn syrup
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cardamom

Toss ingredients together in a bowl and chill. Spoon over pancakes, waffles, or other baked goods.



## Cayenne pepper

The cayenne pepper is a type of chili pepper and a member of the capsicum family of vegetables. When it's ground into a powder, it's also known as red pepper — probably the form you use, if you're adventurous, to add some kick to your recipes. It is rated at about 30,000 to 50,000 Scoville units, a measurement of spicy heat that ranges from 0 to 16,000,000 units. The level of heat in a pepper is based on the concentration of a natural chemical called capsaicin. Not only does capsaicin give you that tongue-tingling zing you love, but it gives peppers, like the cayenne, some medicinal value as well.

In the past 20 years, science has taken capsaicin out of the realm of folk remedy and into the world of medicine. Not only is it used topically for various types of nerve and muscle pain, but there's some evidence it could treat high blood pressure, obesity, and cancer.



### Peachy-keen barbecue sauce

- 1 16-oz can tomato sauce
- 1/2 cup cider vinegar
- 1/2 cup peach preserves
- 4 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/4 cup onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Combine all ingredients in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil and then reduce the heat. Simmer sauce for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove bay leaf, and sauce is ready to use or can be refrigerated.



## Celery seed

Oddly enough, you can't grow celery from celery seeds. At least not the seeds you'll find in your supermarket spice aisle. These tiny, almost-brown seeds are from *Apium graveolens*, also known as wild celery. It's a cousin to the stalk celery you are most familiar with and so the seed has a familiar, celery-like flavor, just a little more bitter and intense.

Use it whole, ground, or mixed with salt — sold commercially as celery salt — as a pickling spice, and in salads, soups, vinaigrettes, and fish dishes.

Historically, celery seeds have been used as a diuretic and to treat gout and arthritis, but there's really no scientific evidence to back this up.

Celery allergy is fairly common, so it's possible someone suffering from this could also react to celery seeds.



### Easy bread and butter pickles

- 8 Kirby cucumbers (about 2 pounds), very thinly sliced
- 1 1/3 cups white distilled vinegar
- 1 cup water
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2 1/2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon mustard seed
- 1/2 teaspoon celery seed
- 1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric

Combine all ingredients, except cucumbers, in a stainless steel saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer for a half hour. Pour pickling liquid over cucumbers and cool to room temperature. Refrigerate overnight. Pickles will keep in the refrigerator for several weeks.



## Chamomile

Make sure your garden has a spot for chamomile. This small, bushy herb, with its daisy-like flowers, is not just pretty, but useful, as well. You may have only heard of chamomile tea — used to relax and help bring on sleep — but this spunky little herb is quite the heavy hitter when it comes to health remedies. It's been used for thousands of years to treat a variety of ailments including anxiety, skin problems, indigestion, and wounds.

Two kinds of chamomile are collected and dried for culinary and medicinal purposes, and you can grow either in most parts of the United States.

- *Matricaria recutita* is an annual, also known as German, Hungarian, or wild chamomile.
- *Chamaemelum nobile*, a perennial, is called Roman, garden, or sweet chamomile.

Both have similar properties, but German chamomile is used more frequently in health research and may be slightly stronger.

To harvest your own, cut the blossoms once they've opened and spread them on paper in a cool space until they become quite dry. Store them in an airtight container and use in potpourri, teas, and recipes.

Although chamomile is considered generally safe, some people are extremely allergic.



### Chamomile cookies

3/4 cup butter, softened      1 1/2 cups sugar  
3 eggs                              3/4 teaspoon vanilla extract  
2 2/3 cups flour, sifted  
1/3 cup dried or fresh chamomile flowers, finely chopped  
(or substitute the contents of 5-7 chamomile tea bags)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream butter and sugar. Beat in eggs and vanilla to the creamed mixture. Add flour and chamomile. Drop dough by teaspoonfuls onto a lightly greased baking sheet. Bake for 10 minutes.



## Chervil

Garden chervil, *Anthriscus cerefolium*, is not a traditional part of most herb gardens, perhaps because many people confuse it with its cousin, wild chervil, a poisonous weed, better known as cow parsley. This annual herb was very popular in the 19th century, when it was often used to give foods a light, anise-like flavor. French chefs were so enamored of it, they made it part of their seasoning staple *fines herbes*, a blend of tarragon, chives, parsley, and chervil.

To use chervil in your kitchen, add a small amount toward the end of preparation, so it won't lose its delicate flavor, or finish a dish with chervil as a garnish.

Preserve chervil leaves in olive oil for later use, or chop them, mix with water, and freeze in an ice cube tray.

Scientists have discovered that chervil acts as an antioxidant and is a rich source of bioflavonoids, a type of plant chemical that helps you better absorb vitamin C. However, more studies are needed before chervil can be safely recommended to treat any condition. As a folk remedy, chervil has been used to treat coughs, high blood pressure, and digestive problems.



### Mustard vinaigrette with chervil

2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

2 tablespoons water

1 teaspoon honey

salt and pepper, to taste

2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

1/2 cup canola oil

1/4 cup chervil leaves, chopped

Whisk together all ingredients except the oil and chervil.

Slowly whisk in the oil, then add the chervil. Use immediately or refrigerate for up to one week.



## Chicory

Like many greens, chicory began life as a weed. But this perennial soon became a valued addition to tables in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome despite its slightly bitter taste. Today it is grown as a salad green and prized for its nutritional punch, being high in vitamins A, C, and K and various minerals. Naturally occurring compounds in chicory, called oligosaccharides, are considered probiotics, which means they help maintain a healthy balance of bacteria in your intestines.

When World War II disrupted the shipment of coffee beans, coffee producers turned to the chicory root. When roasted and ground, chicory root acts as a caffeine-free coffee substitute. It became especially popular in New Orleans, and a coffee-chicory blend is often referred to as Creole coffee.



### Sautéed chicory greens

large bunch of young chicory leaves  
(enough for a medium-size pot)

1 medium onion

1/4 cup olive oil

1 cup mushrooms, sliced

Clean the chicory leaves thoroughly, which may take several rinsings. Discard any discolored or damaged leaves. Tear or roughly chop the leaves. Bring a medium-size pot of water to a boil and toss in the leaves. Simmer for 5 minutes. Drain the leaves into a colander and squeeze out any excess water.

Heat olive oil in a large frying pan and add the chopped onion and mushrooms. Sauté until the onion is translucent and the mushrooms are tender. Add the cooked, drained chicory leaves, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook another 5 to 10 minutes over low heat.

You can serve the chicory greens on top of toasted slices of bread, like bruschetta.



## Cinnamon

The spicy aroma and flavor of cinnamon may make it one of the most beloved condiments in your kitchen. It's versatile enough to flavor a sweet dish or add a subtle warmth to stews and curries.

Taken from the inner bark of a tropical evergreen tree, cinnamon is harvested during the rainy season when it's most flexible. As it dries, it curls into long, thin tubes which are then cut into sticks or ground into powder.

Cinnamon sticks are perfect for infusing flavor into hot liquids — a job ground cinnamon just can't handle. But don't buy the sticks planning to grind your own. Test kitchens have proven the flavor and texture aren't the same.

Scientists are just beginning to learn how cinnamon can be incorporated into modern medicine. They are studying it for use against diabetes, viral infections, stomach complaints, and cancer.



### Greek-style tomato sauce

- |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1 medium onion, finely chopped          | 1 6-oz can tomato paste |
| 2 tablespoons dried parsley flakes      | 6 cloves garlic, minced |
| 3/4 teaspoon oregano                    | 1 teaspoon cinnamon     |
| 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes          | 1/2 cup dry white wine  |
| salt, pepper, and sugar, to taste       | olive oil               |
| 1 28-oz can crushed tomatoes with puree |                         |

In a large pot, sauté the onion in a small amount of olive oil until tender. Stir in the rest of the ingredients except the canned tomatoes. Simmer over low heat for 5 minutes. Add the crushed tomatoes and simmer for 20 minutes. Season to taste. Add an additional 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon of sugar if sauce is too bitter. Serve over cooked pasta or meatballs.



## Cloves

Nothing says Christmas like wassail and mincemeat pie. And you simply can't have either one without cloves. That just might make cloves the official spice of Christmas.

Cloves are actually the dried, unopened flower buds of a tropical evergreen tree native to the Spice Islands of Indonesia. They are pink or green when harvested, then turn a dark brown as they dry. The word cloves comes from the Latin *clavus*, which means nail. If you look at a clove closely, you'll see it resembles a tiny nail, a shape that comes in handy when using cloves to stud oranges or a ham.

Although you can buy cloves whole or ground, experts recommend grinding your own. That way, you retain more of the essential oils. Simply crush them with a mortar and pestle or in a spice grinder.

Clove oil is often used as a topical antiseptic and anesthetic. In fact, gels, creams, and pastes containing clove oil are frequently used in dentistry to relieve pain and fight infection and inflammation.



### Hot mulled apple cider

- 1/2 gallon apple cider (or juice)
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2 whole cloves
- 2 whole allspice
- peel of 1/2 orange, cut into small pieces
- peel of 1/2 lemon, cut into small pieces

Pour apple cider into a slow cooker. Add cinnamon sticks. Place cloves, allspice, and fruit peels into a stainless steel tea infuser. Drop infuser into the slow cooker. Heat on high setting for two hours. Remove tea infuser and cinnamon sticks from the cider. Serve warm.



## Cocoa

Cocoa beans have played a part in various cultures throughout history and all around the globe. Two thousand years ago, the Mayans created a beverage from ground cocoa beans, water, black pepper, vanilla, and other spices to share during marriage ceremonies. This may have been the beginning of a beautiful relationship between chocolate and romance. The Aztecs used cocoa beans as money, to pay taxes to their Emperor. And today, cocoa and chocolate products are a major industry for many countries including the United States, Switzerland, and Italy.

As a medicine, cocoa's history is just as long. It has been used to treat asthma, bronchitis, stomach problems, burns, fatigue, and fever. Cocoa butter is still used to treat wrinkles and prevent stretch marks.

Chocolate flavonoids, natural plant chemicals that play an important role in health, are present in most forms of chocolate, but they are highest in dark chocolate. They've been proven to protect your heart, keep your blood flowing smoothly, and fight dangerous free radicals.

The cocoa tree is native to the tropical regions of South America, but according to the World Cocoa Foundation, about 70 percent of today's production of cocoa comes from West Africa.

Appropriately, the botanical name for the cacao tree is *Theobroma cacao*, which is translated to mean "food of the gods."



### Dry spice rub

2 teaspoons unsweetened cocoa    3 teaspoons ground cumin  
5 teaspoons black peppercorns    2 teaspoons ground allspice  
1 1/2 tablespoons sea salt

Grind all ingredients in a spice grinder. Process until it's a fine consistency. Pat raw steaks dry and rub all over with spice blend. Grill or broil as desired. Store remaining rub in an airtight container.



## Coriander

This fragrant herb, related to the parsley family, is known for both its seeds and leaves. In cooking, the term coriander usually refers to the seeds, while the leaves of the plant are known as cilantro or Chinese parsley. Surprisingly, the two parts of the plant have very distinct flavors. Coriander seeds have a fresh, clean taste, similar to a combination of sage and citrus. Cilantro, sometimes referred to as fresh coriander in recipes, is stronger and considered by many to be an acquired taste.

Use ground coriander seeds in desserts, stews, marinades, chutney, and Indian curries. Whole seeds are often used in pickling and special drinks like mulled wine. They are also an ingredient in Belgian-style wheat beer.

The seeds are high in essential oils, which may explain their use in Chinese herbal medicine for stomachache and nausea. Ayurvedic medicine practitioners prescribe coriander seeds to reduce fever, act as a laxative, and destroy parasitic worms.

Use coriander to make your own spice blends.



### Poultry seasoning

1/2 teaspoon sage	1/2 teaspoon coriander
1/4 teaspoon thyme	1/8 teaspoon allspice
1/8 teaspoon marjoram	

### Curry powder

4 teaspoons coriander	2 teaspoons turmeric
1 teaspoon cinnamon	1 teaspoon cumin
1/2 teaspoon basil or oregano	1/2 teaspoon cardamom

### Steak rub

2 tablespoons coriander	2 1/2 tablespoons table salt
2 tablespoons black peppercorns	1 tablespoon caraway seeds
1 1/2 tablespoons red pepper flakes	



## Cumin

If you've only used cumin in your homemade tacos, you need to expand your horizons. This sharply flavored seed will add a peppery zest to almost any meal.

Cumin is a major ingredient of curry and chili powders, and particularly popular in Asian, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Brazilian, and Cuban cuisine.

Native to the Middle East and India, this parsley relative dates back to the Old Testament, where it was mentioned as both a seasoning and a form of currency. Part of its appeal historically was due to the fact that its punchy flavor made it a practical replacement for black pepper, which was very expensive and hard to come by.

Cumin seeds have traditionally been used to help with digestion, and now laboratory studies are beginning to bear this out. In addition, researchers have found that cumin has antibacterial and antioxidant properties, can keep blood from clotting, and may help control blood sugar levels.

Amazingly, cumin seeds are chock-full of iron, with one tablespoon supplying 22 percent of your daily requirements.

Don't confuse cumin with curcumin, a natural chemical found in turmeric, or black cumin, a totally unrelated spice. And, as with all spices, cumin should be stored in a cool, dark place for no more than six months.



### Sunshine vinaigrette

1/2 cup orange juice	1/2 cup lime juice
4 tablespoons canola oil	2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 teaspoon paprika	2 teaspoons jalapenos, minced
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper	

Mix ingredients and refrigerate. Stir or shake vinaigrette before use. Makes about 1 1/3 cups.



## Dill

Dill is for so much more than pickles. The feathery leaves of this herb — known, unfortunately, as dill weed — have a sweet, grassy taste, and they are delicious in salads, sauces, vegetables, and on fish. Fresh is naturally more pungent than dried, but it loses some potency when heated. So add it to cooked dishes last.

Dill seed, on the other hand, has a strong, spicy flavor and gets even more potent with heat. Many recipes say to toast the seeds in a frying pan before use to get the full benefit.

This hardy perennial herb is native to the Mediterranean region and southern Russia, but it will do quite well as an annual in most home gardens. It's also a good choice for container gardening.

According to folklore, dill is a symbol of luck and well-being. It's been used to settle upset stomachs and battle insomnia. Most recently, dill has been studied for its ability to lower cholesterol.



### Dilly grilled salmon

- 2 pounds boneless salmon filet, with skin
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice, freshly squeezed
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill weed
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, and dill. Season the salmon with salt and pepper and lay it in a shallow dish. Coat both sides with the marinade. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Preheat the grill to medium-high. Place the salmon on the grill skin-side down. Grill for 5 minutes — slightly more if it is thicker than 1 inch. Carefully turn and grill it skin-side up for an additional 5 minutes. Makes 4 servings.



## Fennel

Nothing goes to waste with fennel. Depending on which variety you're talking about, the bulb, stalk, feathery leaves, and green-brown seeds are all edible. The bulb is crunchy and sweet, and it can be eaten raw or prepared like any other vegetable. Its mild, licorice-like taste becomes even lighter when it's cooked. Fennel stalks are also good raw or in soups, stocks and stews, while the leaves can be used as a seasoning. Dried fennel seeds are available whole or ground and add a zippy flavor to both sweet and savory dishes.

Fennel is a good source of vitamins A and C, fiber, folate, and potassium, as well as an interesting natural plant chemical anethole, which is showing promise as a treatment for inflammation.

Fennel tea is a popular folk remedy for indigestion and other stomach complaints, while some people claim chewing the seeds helps suppress their appetite.

Fresh fennel is usually available from autumn through early spring. Store it in your refrigerator crisper, where it should keep for about four days.



### Grilled fennel

- 2 large fennel bulbs
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper

Trim stalks from fennel, and remove any tough outer layers. Slice bulbs into multiple wedges, approximately 1/4-inch thick. Toss fennel wedges in olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Grill over a medium-hot fire until tender, about 7 to 9 minutes, turning once. Makes 4 servings.



## Fenugreek

Need a shot of iron? Add just a tablespoon of fenugreek seeds to your diet, and you'll get 20 percent of your daily requirements. You'll also get 3 grams of fiber and a good dose of several minerals.

This native of Asia and southern Europe has been used for centuries as a cooking spice, lending its maple syrup flavor to many ethnic dishes. It is sometimes an ingredient in garam masala, a spice blend popular in India and other south Asian countries. While fenugreek is best known for its seeds, you can eat the leaves – they are just difficult to find in most Western supermarkets.

Fenugreek seeds are even more flavorful after they are roasted and ground. For fresher taste, try grinding your own. You'll need a special poppy seed grinder for this job since the seeds are too hard to grind using a mortar and pestle.

You can also buy fenugreek extract in a liquid or spray, poultice, capsules, tablets, and tea.

Scientists are excited about the possibility of using fenugreek to help control diabetes and cholesterol. But more research is needed before it can be recommended.



### Herbaceously delicious sun tea

Cut 1/2 to 1 cup of fresh fenugreek and mint into coarse pieces and place into a quart canning jar. Fill jar with water and shake gently. Place jar where it will receive full sunlight throughout the day — and shake occasionally. When daylight fades, give a final shake to the mixture and strain the herbs from the liquid. Serve herb tea over ice and enjoy.



## Garlic

Garlic may be the most well-known and easily recognizable herb in the world, thanks to its distinctively spicy flavor and pungent odor. As a member of the lily family, it is a cousin to onions, leeks, chives, and shallots. But garlic is, by far, more widely minced, chopped, diced, and crushed in kitchens all over the world.

Throughout history, garlic has been used as a food, a medicine, and a form of currency. It was once believed to cure leprosy, deafness, and toothaches. Modern uses, while still varied, have the backing of modern science.

As recently as World War II, garlic was used to disinfect wounds. Studies of its antibacterial properties show that garlic can, indeed, fight the growth of many strains of bacteria, causing some to call it nature's penicillin. It has also shown promise in treating heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol, and, perhaps, cancer.

Breaking open a garlic clove seems to release the medicinal chemicals inside. That means you don't get as many health benefits from a whole, unbroken garlic clove as you do from one that has been chopped or crushed. And prep it at the last minute. Garlic that is freshly pressed is more potent than processed.



### Garlic chip garnish

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 12 medium garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- Salt, to taste

Sauté garlic in oil over medium-high heat until golden brown. This will only take a minute or two. Beware — it burns quickly. Remove garlic from the pan with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Lightly salt the garlic chips and use as garnish on soups and salads.



## Ginger

It's peppery and a little sweet. It's fragrant and it's spicy. It's also gnarly and bumpy. But the root of the ginger plant adds such a special flavor to stir-fries, fruits, and vegetables, no one cares what it looks like.

You can buy ginger already ground in a jar, or sliced, pickled, crystallized, and even covered in chocolate. But it's especially terrific when you buy it fresh. Look for a firm root with a tough, smooth skin, which you'll peel to get to the flesh underneath.

Medicinal ginger dates back hundreds of years — and used to treat everything from colds and fever to urinary problems and joint pain. But ginger is perhaps best-known as a remedy against digestive complaints, especially nausea.



### Quick and easy gingerbread

1/2 cup sugar	1 egg
2 1/2 cups flour	1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon	1 teaspoon dried ginger
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves	1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup molasses	1 cup hot water
1/2 cup oil (or 1/4 cup oil plus 1/8 cup prune puree)	

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a 9-inch square baking pan. In a large mixing bowl, combine sugar, oil (or oil and prune puree), and egg. Beat well and set aside. Combine flour and other dry ingredients in another bowl, stirring until well-blended. Stir the molasses and water together. Alternate adding flour mixture and molasses mixture to the sugar, oil, and egg mixture. When everything is well-blended, pour into the baking pan. Bake for about 1 hour. Makes 9 servings.



## Horseradish

The next time you're suffering from a stuffy nose, reach for horseradish. This spicy condiment can really break up mucus and open your sinuses. If you need a little sugar to help the medicine go down, mix the horseradish with a bit of honey. This not only makes it more appetizing, but boosts the germ-fighting power as well.

The horseradish plant is a hardy perennial related to mustard and cabbage — and grown successfully in most home gardens. Just be careful — it can take over your yard. Keep it in check by planting in a bottomless pot sunk into the ground.

You can buy prepared horseradish in a jar or the fresh root in most supermarket produce sections. If you go with fresh, you won't notice any odor until you cut into it. That's because breaking down the cell walls releases an enzyme that converts the plant's natural chemicals into mustard oil, the eye-stinging vapor that can irritate your mucous membranes. Peel and grate the root to use in sauces or as a relish for meat and fish.

In folk medicine, horseradish has a long history. It was used traditionally to treat respiratory conditions, relieve gas, stimulate the appetite, and relieve pain. Today, researchers believe horseradish acts as a natural antibacterial, and it may be used to treat and prevent various types of infections.



### Seafood cocktail sauce

1/2 cup ketchup  
2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce  
1 tablespoon prepared horseradish  
(or 1 1/2 teaspoons freshly grated horseradish)

1/2 cup chili sauce  
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Combine all ingredients in a small bowl. Mix well. Refrigerate until ready to use.



## Lavender

You may not think of lavender as a kitchen or medicinal herb, but it is more than just a pretty fragrance.

The use of lavender in folk medicine dates back for centuries. Teas and extracts were used to treat pain and infection. Small bags of lavender flowers were often placed under pillows to help people relax and sleep. And the steam from boiled flowers was inhaled as a cold remedy.

English lavender, *Lavandula angustifolia*, is the most common species, but there are more than 30 types grown throughout the world. These evergreen shrubs boast small blue or purple flowers that contain the essential oil used in aromatherapy, cosmetics, massage oils, perfumes, powders, soaps, and shampoos.

In addition, lavender is a traditional ingredient in the French spice blend herbes de Provence, along with basil, fennel seed, marjoram, rosemary, sage, summer savory, and thyme. This blend seasons meat, vegetables, and poultry in many authentic French recipes.

Currently, lavender oil is used to reduce stress, but it also shows promise in treating digestive disorders and fighting certain bacteria.



### Sweet herbed iced tea

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| 2 family-size tea bags                              | 2 quarts water |
| 1 teaspoon whole rosemary leaves                    | 3/4 cup sugar  |
| 1/2 teaspoon dried lavender                         |                |
| 1 1/2 tablespoons lemon verbena leaves, roughly cut |                |

Combine everything except the teabags in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil and immediately remove the pan from the heat. Drop the tea bags into the hot liquid. Steep for 5 to 9 minutes. The longer you steep, the stronger the flavor. Remove the tea bags and pour liquid through a strainer to remove the herb sediment. Chill and enjoy.



## Lemongrass

It's one of the most important flavorings in Vietnamese and Thai cooking, and once found only in Asian markets. But now lemongrass is going mainstream. This spiky perennial has a fresh citrus aroma and lemony flavor, adding a unique zest to drinks, curries, soups, and stews.

If you plan to use lemongrass for seasoning, take just the stalks, cut them into 3-inch pieces, and crush them to release the essential oil, called citral. Just be sure to remove the pieces before serving.

Because lemongrass is very tough and fibrous, if you plan to eat it in a dish, you'll have to take steps to soften it. You can either thoroughly pre-boil small pieces in broth, or pulverize them in a food processor before adding to your recipe.

Lemongrass tea has been used in folk medicine to treat digestive problems, fever, sleep disorders, and anxiety. The essential oil is used in deodorants, fragrances, and insect repellents.



### DIY Lemongrass oil

2 cups canola oil

8 stalks fresh lemongrass

10 black peppercorns

Heat oil in saucepan. Using the side of a heavy knife, smash the lemongrass stalks and then chop the pieces. Add the lemongrass and black peppercorns to the hot oil. Bring the contents to a boil and remove the pan from the heat. Cool the mixture for about 6 hours. Strain the oil into a bottle, removing the peppercorns and herb bits. Cover and refrigerate. Lemongrass oil will keep for 2 weeks in the refrigerator and up to 6 months in the freezer. Use it in food recipes or make your own aromatherapy massage oil and bath salts.



## Mace

The taste of this spice may remind you of nutmeg — just a bit lighter and sweeter. That's not surprising since they both come from the nutmeg tree, *Myristica fragrans*. It is native to the Banda Islands of Indonesia, although it's now grown in many other tropical regions.

The fruit of the nutmeg tree is called a drupe or a nutmeg apple, and looks a bit like an apricot. When this matures and splits open, you can see the inner nut — which is dried to produce nutmeg — and its thin, red covering, called mace. When the mace is removed from the nutmeg and dried, it fades to a light orange-brown. It's usually sold ground, but if you can find them, whole pieces of mace are called blades. You can substitute nutmeg and mace for each other in most recipes.

Mace has been used in folk medicine to treat measles, insomnia, and diarrhea. Researchers are now interested in this spice because it may have antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antifungal, and even anticancer properties. Some studies show that chewing gum made with mace extract can decrease dental plaque and fight gingivitis.



### Beau Monde seasoning mix

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1 tablespoon ground allspice                      | 1 tablespoon ground mace   |
| 1 teaspoon celery seed                            | 1 tablespoon ground cloves |
| 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg                          | 1 tablespoon salt          |
| 2 tablespoons ground white pepper                 |                            |
| 2 tablespoons ground black pepper                 |                            |
| 1 1/4 teaspoons ground cinnamon                   |                            |
| 1 tablespoon ground bay leaves or bay leaf powder |                            |

This mix will add flavor to fish, poultry, beef, vegetables, and many sauces and dips. This recipe yields about 1/2 cup of seasoning mix.



## Marjoram

Sweet marjoram is a perennial herb with a mild flavor very similar to oregano. This member of the mint family is originally from the Mediterranean region, but it will grow as an annual in most kitchen gardens. You'll want to harvest the leaves to use in a variety of dishes, especially those containing lamb and veal. Just add marjoram near the end of cooking time so you don't lose its delicate flavor.

According to folk medicine, marjoram can treat nausea, headaches, muscle spasms, and insomnia. Singers sometimes drink it as a tea to soothe and protect their voices, and its essential oil is often used in aromatherapy to calm and relieve stress. Early scientific studies show marjoram might be useful in treating asthma and certain skin disorders.



### Savory stew

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1 large onion, chopped                        | 1 teaspoon vinegar    |
| 1 tablespoon paprika                          | 1/2 teaspoon marjoram |
| 2 teaspoons caraway seeds                     | 4 cups beef broth     |
| 2 teaspoons tomato paste                      | 1 tablespoon flour    |
| 2 tablespoons butter or margarine             |                       |
| 1 pound beef stew meat, cut into 1-inch cubes |                       |
| 2 medium-size potatoes, cubed                 |                       |
| Salt and pepper, to taste                     |                       |

Heat butter or margarine in a Dutch oven, and sauté onion until golden brown. Stir in vinegar, paprika, marjoram, caraway seeds, broth, tomato paste, and beef. Add salt and pepper to taste. Mix well. Cover and simmer for 1 to 1 1/2 hours or until meat is tender. Combine flour and a little liquid from the pot, stirring until smooth. Stir this mixture into the stew. Add potatoes and cook until tender. Makes 4 servings.



## Mint

There are more than 30 types of mint, but you're probably most familiar with peppermint and spearmint. Both have a fresh, spicy aroma and flavor, with spearmint being sweeter and milder. Mint is an aggressive plant, growing wild throughout the world and easily taking over any backyard garden if you're not careful. It's a great plant for containers, not only to curb its growth but to also make it accessible to the cook. Add mint leaves to your favorite hot or cold drinks, and use them to liven up salads, sauces, and cooked dishes.

Mint is available fresh in your supermarket produce section, dried in the spice aisle, and as an oil in enteric-coated capsules, soft gelatin capsules, and in liquid form.

Peppermint oil and peppermint tea are often taken to soothe digestive complaints, like indigestion, irritable bowel syndrome, and gas, and to treat throat and respiratory problems. Just don't take peppermint oil if you suffer from heartburn or ulcers — it could make your symptoms worse.



### Go-bananas salsa

- 2 large bananas, chopped into 1/4-inch pieces
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped into 1/4-inch pieces
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped into 1/4-inch pieces
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 3 green onions, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh ginger
- 3 tablespoons fresh lime or lemon juice
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh mint leaves
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 2 tablespoons packed light brown sugar (optional)
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Lightly toss all the ingredients. Makes 4 servings.



## Mustard seeds

The mustard plant not only provides delicious greens that can spice up a salad, the seeds can add a little heat to a variety of dishes.

While there are many varieties of mustard, only two produce seeds most often used in cooking — white or yellow mustard, *Sinapis alba*, and brown mustard, *Brassica juncea*. The small, round seeds are harvested, dried, and sometimes blended together. They are sold whole, ground into powder, or processed with other ingredients to make prepared mustard. Brown mustard seeds are smaller and hotter than the white variety, which are the main ingredient in American-style mustards. Brown seeds are most often used in pickling, and they are the main ingredient in Dijon and Chinese mustards.

Mustard seeds and mustard oil have been used as medicine for thousands of years mostly to stimulate appetite and treat bronchitis and pneumonia — in the form of plasters applied to the skin. Unfortunately, mustard oil can be highly irritating to your skin.



### Fruit and herb sauce for veggies

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1 red pepper, thinly sliced                          | 1 teaspoon sugar           |
| 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar                        | 1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch |
| 1 tablespoon grated orange peel                      | 1/4 cup beef stock         |
| 1/4 cup fresh orange juice                           | 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard |
| 1/2 cup mustard seeds                                |                            |
| 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce                      |                            |
| Salt and pepper, to taste                            |                            |
| 1 pound asparagus, peeled and blanched for 4 minutes |                            |
| 1 cup broccoli florets, blanched for 2 minutes       |                            |

Toss vegetables together. Set aside. Mix remaining ingredients in a saucepan and simmer until thick and creamy, about 4 to 5 minutes. Pour over vegetables and refrigerate for 2 hours. Serve chilled or at room temperature. Makes 4 servings.



## Nutmeg

Nutmeg and mace are two slightly different spices that come from the same tree. Nutmeg is from the seed of the tree and mace is from the seed covering. They are enough alike in taste that you can substitute one for the other in most dishes.

You may know nutmeg best as the topping of choice on eggnog, but this sweet spice is excellent in custards, sauces, and baked goods — and on fruits and vegetables, like squash and potatoes.

You can buy nutmeg already ground, but experts agree the taste of freshly ground nutmeg is far superior. There are graters and grinders designed specifically for nutmeg, or you can simply use the smallest side of your standard box grater.

Be careful getting too much nutmeg if you have diabetes since it can affect your blood sugar. Your doctor should be able to tell you how much is safe for you.



### Creamy spinach yogurt sauce

- 1 10-oz box frozen chopped spinach, thawed
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Squeeze spinach to remove excess moisture. Melt butter on low heat. Add onion and cook until soft and translucent, 3 to 4 minutes. Add spinach and nutmeg, and simmer for 5 minutes. Transfer the solids to a food processor, and puree until smooth. Return the puree to the skillet, and stir in the yogurt. Bring to a gentle boil, add salt and pepper to taste, and serve hot over fish or chicken. Makes 3 servings.



## Oregano

You may think of pizza when you think of oregano, but this pungent herb adds excitement to almost any dish — Mexican, Greek, American, and Italian.

Oregano, whose botanical name, *Origanum vulgare*, means “joy of the mountain,” is a perennial herb native to northern Europe where it has been cultivated since the Middle Ages. Today it is grown all over the world. A member of the mint family, oregano is similar in flavor to marjoram. In fact, it’s sometimes called wild marjoram.

Oregano makes a great addition to your annual herb garden. You simply need to duplicate conditions found in the Mediterranean to make it feel at home. Give it just a little water, well-drained soil, and plenty of sun. For the most robust flavor, harvest oregano leaves in early summer, when the plant’s essential oils are most concentrated.

The leaves, stems, and flowers of oregano have all been used in folk medicine to treat asthma, bronchitis, and digestive problems. Oregano oil is currently used to treat infections. In addition, ongoing research is exploring oregano’s antibacterial, antioxidant, antifungal, and insect-repelling properties.



### Fiesta omelet filling

- |                                      |                              |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 tablespoon butter                  | Dash ground cumin            |
| 1 cup salsa                          | 2 green onions, chopped      |
| 1 tomato, peeled and chopped         | 1/2 red bell pepper, chopped |
| Salt and pepper, to taste            |                              |
| 1 teaspoon chopped fresh oregano     |                              |
| 4 ounces grated Monterey Jack cheese |                              |

Melt butter in a large skillet. Add cumin and heat until fragrant. Add vegetables and oregano. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and sauté until just done, 2 to 3 minutes. Fill basic omelets with the mixture before turning out. Top the filled omelets with salsa and cheese. Makes 2 servings.



## Paprika

Paprika is a spice made by grinding a certain variety of dried red peppers, *Capsicum annuum*, into powder. The color of paprika ranges from bright orange-red to deep red to almost brown. The flavor can also vary, from mild and sweet to smoky and hot. It all depends on the exact type of pepper used, what parts of the pepper are ground, and how the paprika is processed.

In the kitchen, paprika adds special flavor to rice, shellfish, cauliflower, lamb, and dishes like stroganoff and goulash. To increase its punch of flavor and color, heat the paprika in a little oil before adding it to your recipe.

Paprika is also used to add natural coloring to some commercial food items, like orange juice, and can even alter the taste of eggs when mixed with chicken feed.

Sprinkle paprika on liberally — it is full of antioxidants, like vitamin C, vitamin A, beta carotene, lutein, and zeaxanthin. These substances protect your cells from damage caused by unstable molecules called free radicals.



### Orange roughy Romano

1 pound orange roughy filets      1/2 cup low-fat sour cream  
1/4 teaspoon salt                      1/4 teaspoon paprika  
1/4 cup grated Romano cheese  
1 1/2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice  
3/4 teaspoon instant minced onions  
Dash hot pepper sauce

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9 x 13 baking pan with nonstick spray. Separate filets into 3 portions. Place in a single layer in greased baking pan. Combine sour cream, Romano cheese, lemon juice, hot pepper sauce, onions, and salt, and spread over fish. Sprinkle paprika on top. Bake 25 to 30 minutes, or until fish flakes easily with a fork. Makes 3 servings.



## Parsley

Don't ignore that sprig of parsley garnishing your plate. Eat it and you'll get a healthy dose of vitamins C, A, and K, plus the flavonoid luteolin, which acts as an antioxidant to protect your cells from damage.

There are more than 30 varieties of parsley, but the most popular are flat and curly. Flat-leaf parsley, also known as Italian parsley, has a bright, fresh flavor and strong aroma. Many experts prefer cooking with flat-leaf, but it's sometimes hard to find in the supermarket.

Curly-leaf parsley is the type you're probably most familiar with. It has a slightly bitter taste but looks pretty on a plate and is available year-round.

Because parsley is native to the Mediterranean region, it doesn't like cold winters. So most gardeners treat it as an annual. It's easy to grow in pots indoors as long as it has well-drained soil and gets good light.



### Italian vegetable salad

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1/2 cup raw wild rice                       | 1/2 cup raw converted rice |
| 2 scallions, finely chopped                 | 3 tablespoons olive oil    |
| 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard                    | Salt and pepper, to taste  |
| 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar              |                            |
| 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley               |                            |
| 1/4 cup chopped fresh chives                |                            |
| 1 large ripe tomato, seeded and chopped     |                            |
| 1 zucchini, seeded and chopped              |                            |
| 1/4 pound mushrooms, wiped clean and sliced |                            |
| 1 small red bell pepper, finely chopped     |                            |

Cook both kinds of rice according to package directions. Drain well. Combine rice and vegetables. Whisk together the oil, vinegar, and mustard. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and pour over the rice and vegetables. Add parsley and chives and toss. Makes 4 servings.



## Rosemary

The evergreen rosemary shrub is a wonderful element in any garden — whether you're a gourmet chef or not. It's a pretty plant, with flat needles that are green on top and silver-white underneath and flowers that can range from pink to white to blue, depending on the variety. It's very fragrant, with a sharp scent somewhere between lemon and pine that's so popular the extract is used in cosmetics and other products. Aromatherapists believe breathing the vapors of rosemary's essential oil can increase alertness and treat anxiety.

One of the oldest known medicinal herbs, rosemary has been used for centuries to boost brain function and memory. Today, scientists are interested in its antioxidant properties that might be used to fight cancer and inflammation.

And, of course, rosemary is a must-have in the kitchen. Whether you grow your own or buy fresh or dried leaves at the supermarket, use it to season soups, vegetables, meat, fish, and egg dishes.



### Rosemary fettucine

1 pound fettucine                      1/4 cup rosemary butter\*  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil  
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese  
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar  
Salt and pepper, to taste

\*To make rosemary butter, pulse 3 tablespoons rosemary in a food processor until bruised. Add 1 stick room-temperature butter and 1 peeled garlic clove. Puree until smooth. Refrigerate or freeze until needed.

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil. Add pasta and stir. Return to a boil and cook, uncovered, until al dente, according to package directions. Drain well and return to the same pot. Add rosemary butter, basil, Parmesan cheese, and balsamic vinegar, and toss thoroughly. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Makes 6 servings.



## Saffron

Saffron is the world's most expensive spice, costing anywhere from \$30 to \$300 an ounce. This is primarily because it is so labor-intensive to harvest.

The spice, which gives food a distinctive golden-yellow color, comes from a small purple crocus grown mainly in Iran — although some is grown commercially in Spain and India. Each flower produces tiny, crimson strands, called stigmas, that must be hand-picked and dried. It takes more than 4,000 flowers to provide just 1 ounce of saffron. You can buy the whole stigmas, which are called threads, or the powdered form.

Thousands of years ago, saffron was first used as a medicine, and only later become an important culinary spice and dye. According to folklore, it can help you sleep, relieve pain, lift your spirits, and treat asthma. Modern scientists are studying the spice because it contains natural chemicals that may fight cancer and depression.

You'll use saffron in many traditional dishes like bouillabaisse, paella, and risotto Milanese.



### No-fuss saffron rice

3 1/2 cups chicken stock	1/2 teaspoon turmeric
1/4 teaspoon saffron powder	1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 teaspoon chili powder	1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
2 cups white basmati rice	1/4 teaspoon salt

Add chicken stock to a medium-size pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low. Stir in turmeric, saffron, garlic, chili powder, and lemon juice. Add rice and salt to broth, stirring well. Cover and cook 15 minutes or until the broth is absorbed. Turn off the heat and keep the pot covered. Check seasoning and add more salt if needed. Fluff rice before serving. Makes 4 side-dish servings.



## Sage

The botanical name for sage, *Salvia officinalis*, means “to save” or “to cure,” which accurately reflects its long role in folk medicine. This bushy perennial has been used for centuries to treat wounds, indigestion, sleep problems, headaches, and sweating. As a mouthwash or gargle, sage is said to soothe the inflammation of a sore throat. Some people even claim it can improve memory and mental performance. Studies are ongoing to determine if sage could be a weapon in the battle against Alzheimer’s disease.

A great choice for container gardening, sage grows best in well-drained soil and full sun. Harvest the leaves before or just after blooming for top flavor. Add sage to bean or pork dishes, stuffings, and sausage. It will lend a slightly bitter, minty taste. Dried whole or powdered sage is available year-round.



### Pasta with sage

1 pound ziti	2 tablespoons butter
35 fresh sage leaves	1 1/4 cups parmesan cheese
Salt and pepper, to taste	

Cook the butter and sage in a large skillet or saucepan over medium heat until the butter is browned but not burned. Reduce heat to low. Cook pasta separately in a large pot of salted water until al dente. Do not overcook. Drain the pasta, reserving 3/4 cup of the water. Add pasta to the butter and sage. Increase heat to medium. Stir in reserved pasta water and cook for less than a minute or until the pasta absorbs some of the water. Stir in the cheese to make a creamy sauce, season, and serve.



## Savory

Both winter and summer savory have been used for centuries as cooking herbs. They are similar to oregano in taste, although summer savory is a bit lighter and sweeter. Summer savory is an annual herb, while winter savory is a perennial. They are native to the Mediterranean region but grow in many parts of the world.

According to folk medicine, savory can treat cramps, muscle pains, nausea, indigestion, diarrhea, and infectious diseases. While there's no hard evidence to back up these claims, scientists are intrigued by certain compounds in savory's essential oil. They are exploring ways the oil could be useful in treating bacteria, digestive problems, inflammation, and symptoms of diabetes.

Summer savory is more popular for cooking or using fresh. The winter variety has a strong flavor and is usually cooked in meat dishes and stews. Unless you grow it yourself, you may have trouble finding fresh savory, but you should be able to buy it dried.



### Greek chicken marinade

- |  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1/4 cup lemon juice                                      | 1/4 cup olive oil       |
| 1/4 cup vinegar  | 1/4 teaspoon salt       |
| 1/4 teaspoon pepper                                      | 2 garlic cloves, minced |
| 1/2 teaspoon paprika                                     | 1/2 teaspoon savory     |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons prepared mustard                         |                         |
| 2 pounds boneless chicken breasts, cut into 2-inch cubes |                         |

Combine all marinade ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Stir in chicken pieces and marinate in the refrigerator for up to 2 hours. Thread chicken chunks on skewers and grill over high heat with grill lid closed. Grill for approximately 8 minutes, turning once. Use a meat thermometer, if necessary, to insure chicken reaches an internal temperature of 165 degrees.



## Tamarind

The tamarind is a tall, tropical fruit tree, best known for its large pods containing seeds and a dark brown, sweet-sour pulp. The concentrated pulp is a popular flavoring in East Indian and Middle Eastern cuisines. In addition, it flavors tropical soft drinks, is an ingredient in Worcestershire sauce, and can be sugared and formed into patties as a sweet treat. Visit an ethnic or specialty market to buy jars of concentrated pulp, canned paste, or whole tamarind pods dried into syrup or powder.

In animal studies, tamarind lowered cholesterol and blood sugar levels, but there's no evidence of this in people.



### Grilled tamarind chicken

- |   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1/2 cup tamarind concentrate                | 4 tablespoons boiling water |
| 1/4 cup chicken broth                       | 1 teaspoon honey            |
| 2 teaspoons sea salt                        | 10 sprigs fresh parsley     |
| 5 green onions, whole                       |                             |
| dash hot pepper sauce (optional)            |                             |
| 10-12 chicken thighs, boneless and skinless |                             |

Dissolve the tamarind concentrate in boiling water in a large bowl. Stir in chicken broth, hot sauce, honey, and salt. Gather and tie the parsley and green onions together so they can be submerged in the bowl's mixture. Add the chicken thighs and mix well to coat. Pour the entire bowl's contents into a resealable plastic bag and refrigerate overnight. Turn the bag occasionally to help mix the flavors.

When ready to grill, remove the chicken from the bag and pat dry. Pour the remaining marinade mixture into a saucepan, without the parsley and onions, and bring to a boil. Boil for a few minutes until thickened and then brush on the chicken while grilling. Grill for 12 to 16 minutes, turning once, or until a meat thermometer reads 165 degrees. Discard the marinade.



## Tarragon

The French call tarragon the “King of Herbs” and use it to season many of their classic recipes, such as Béarnaise sauce. It’s not surprising since this aromatic perennial herb has a distinctive but mild licorice flavor.

As with most herbs, you can buy a dried and powdered version, but chefs recommend using fresh tarragon since the flavors are much more intense. Just take care it doesn’t overpower your dish.

Tarragon is also a great herb for flavoring vinegars and oils. Simply put fresh, clean tarragon sprigs into bottles of either vinegar or olive oil and allow to steep until it suits your taste.

While tarragon is less known for its medicinal properties, it has been used to stimulate appetite, treat indigestion, and control blood sugar levels. Tarragon tea is also a traditional remedy for insomnia. Laboratory studies on tarragon extract show certain compounds help keep blood clots from forming and could, potentially, protect against heart attack and stroke.



### Low-fat herb dip

- 8 ounces low-fat cream cheese
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon dried tarragon
- 1/2 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh chives
- 3/4 cup low-fat buttermilk, or enough to thin cheese
- Salt, to taste

Process the cream cheese in a food processor, using the buttermilk to thin it to the desired consistency. Add garlic, tarragon, basil, thyme, and pepper, and mix well. Stir in the parsley and chives. Add salt to taste. Cover and refrigerate. Serve chilled with fresh vegetables.



## Thyme

The minty-lemon flavor of thyme is so valued by chefs it appears in several international, classic herbal blends, such as herbes de Provence, bouquet garni, and zaatar.

A member of the mint family, thyme is native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean. There are more than 400 species of thyme, but common thyme, *Thymus vulgaris*, is perhaps the most well-known. It's commercially grown in Europe, Morocco, and the United States, and appears in home gardens all over the world. Even though it is a delicate looking herb, thyme is actually a hardy plant and will grow well under most conditions. It prefers full sun and light, sandy soil. For best flavor, harvest the leaves in mid-summer, just before it flowers.

The leafy parts of the herb and its essential oil have been used to flavor food, add fragrance to cosmetics, and preserve meat in times before refrigeration. Thyme oil was used as an antiseptic during World War I, and a tea made from the leaves is a traditional treatment for coughs, sore throats, bronchitis, and other upper respiratory problems. Thymol, an extract of thyme oil, is, in fact, an ingredient in many commercial mouthwashes, including Listerine. In laboratory experiments, thyme works against various gram-positive bacteria, which include staph and strep.



### Herbed dressing

- 6 tablespoons balsamic or red wine vinegar
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 tablespoons lemon juice
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme leaves

Mix ingredients in a bottle or jar. Refrigerate. Shake well before using. Makes about 2/3 cup of dressing.



## Turmeric

Turmeric is best known as one of the ingredients in curry powder, and perhaps least known as the ingredient that gives American-style mustard its bright yellow color.

It comes from the root of the tropical plant *Curcuma longa*, which is grown throughout the Caribbean, India, China, and southern Asia. To produce the turmeric you'll find in the supermarket, the root is boiled, peeled, dried, and then ground into a fine powder. Because of its deep yellow-orange color, it has been used as a textile dye. Be careful when working with it — it can easily stain your hands and clothing.

Some call turmeric “Indian saffron,” because you can substitute a pinch for saffron to give any dish that traditional golden-yellow hue. Unfortunately, the flavors are completely different. Turmeric has a warm, peppery taste, while saffron is slightly bitter and totally unique.

Turmeric may be one of the most important medicinal spices of this century because of one of its chemical elements, curcumin. Modern research shows curcumin acts as an antioxidant and an anti-inflammatory, and could be used to treat a variety of conditions including high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease.



### Lemon herbed rice

- |                                   |                    |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1/4 cup butter                    | 1 teaspoon salt    |
| 1/2 teaspoon turmeric             | Juice of 1/2 lemon |
| 1/2 teaspoon black mustard seed   |                    |
| 2 cups cooked white or brown rice |                    |

Melt butter in a saucepan. Add salt, mustard seed, and turmeric, and stir until they are well-blended. Add the rice and lemon juice, and heat through, stirring constantly. Makes approximately 4 servings.



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