

**DESHI MIX**  
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# Kitchen spices and herbs

Food is always better when properly seasoned. You'll enjoy cooking a lot more once you've mastered the herb and spice basics. Spices are almost always used in their dried form. They can be found whole or ground. Spices are much more varied in flavour than herbs and tend to pack a bigger punch.

In the culinary arts, the word spice refers to any dried part of a plant, other than the leaves, used for seasoning and flavouring a recipe, but not used as the main ingredient. Why not the leaves? Because the green leafy parts of plants used in this way are considered herbs.

Every other part of the plant, including dried bark, roots, berries, seeds, twigs, or anything else that isn't a green leafy part, is considered a spice.

One way of categorising spices and herbs is according to their source of plant part--

**Leaves of aromatic plants:** Examples include bay leaf, thyme, curry leaf etc.

**Seeds:** Examples include fennel, coriander, fenugreek, mustard, cumin, nutmeg dill, aniseed, etc.

**Fruits:** Cardamom, cayenne pepper, black pepper, vanilla, all spice, tamarind etc.

**Roots or bulbs:** Examples include garlic, ginger, turmeric, galangal etc.

**Bark:** Cinnamon, cassia etc.

**Flower:** Cloves are dried flower bud, saffron, asafoetida etc.

**Arils:** Such as mace (part of nutmeg plant fruit).

## CHILLI PEPPERS

Chilli peppers are the fruit of capsicum pepper plants, notable for their hot flavour. They are members of the nightshade family, related to bell peppers and tomatoes. Many varieties of chilli peppers exist, such as cayenne and jalapeño. Chilli peppers are primarily used as a spice and can be cooked or dried and powdered.

There are over 100 varieties of chilli peppers in Mexico alone, each with its own distinct flavour. In general, the smaller the chilli, the hotter the taste- although this is not a guarantee.

Capsicum is the main bioactive plant compound in chilli peppers, responsible for their unique, pungent taste and many of their health benefits.

Chilli peppers are rich in vitamins and minerals. Chilli peppers are very high in this powerful antioxidant, which is important for wound healing and immune function. Red chilli peppers are high in beta carotene, which your body converts into vitamin A. Chilli peppers provide some carbs and offer a small amount of protein and fibre.

Chilli peppers' health benefits include improving cognitive function, contribution to red blood cell formation, reducing blood pressure and preventing cardiovascular disease, act as natural pain reliever, clear nasal congestion, soothe intestinal diseases and disorders, boost immunity and maintain healthy eyes. Other benefits include preventing cancer, promoting weight loss and improving longevity.

The next time you prepare a meal, add an extra spark with chilli peppers. Getting teary eye or a slight burn in your tongue

can be all worth getting used to, especially when you stand to benefit from such a long list of health benefits.

## TURMERIC

Turmeric is a flowering plant. Turmeric is best known as a spice. It's one of the main components of curry powder. It is commonly used in Asian food. Turmeric, sometimes called Indian saffron or the golden spice, is a tall plant that grows in Asia and Central America. It has a warm, bitter taste and is frequently used to flavour or colour curry powders, mustards, butters, and cheeses. But the root of turmeric is also used widely to make medicine. It contains a yellow-coloured chemical called curcumin, which is often used to colour foods and cosmetics.

### Nutritional value

Turmeric contains more than 300 naturally occurring components including beta carotene, ascorbic acid (vitamin C), calcium,



flavonoids, fibre, iron, niacin, potassium, zinc and other nutrients. But the chemical in turmeric linked to its most highly touted health effects is curcumin.

Health benefits associated with turmeric, the ground and dried aromatic root, makes food more appetising. It contains 5 per cent essential oil. Protective factors in turmeric help in detoxifying harmful drugs and chemicals that are converted to toxic metabolites. Turmeric also helps in increasing the mucin content of gastric juice and reduce irritation in stomach. It is also used to relieve sore throat, cough, cold and against flatulence. Turmeric can be a potent anti-cancer agent.

## CORIANDER SEEDS

Coriandrum Sativum is known as dhania is a native of Mediterranean region. It is unmatched for its fresh delicate spring-like aroma. The seeds contain 0.5-1 per cent essential oil.

All parts of the plant are edible, but the fresh leaves and dried seeds are the parts most traditionally used in cooking, coriander is used in cuisines throughout the world. The dry fruits are known as coriander seeds. The roasted powdered seeds are used as an ingredient of curry powders. It is used as flavouring and thickening agent in cookery. In the form of powder, it is used in all curries, vegetables and chutney powders. It is also used as whole and sprinkled over samosas and kachuri. It also acts as preservative in meat preparation.

Coriander seeds are chewed to correct

foul breath. An infusion of coriander seeds is used in flatulence, vomiting and intestinal disorders. Coriander seeds contain thallides which increase the levels of anti-cancer protective enzymes.

## CUMIN SEEDS

Oblong dark brown seeds with very distinct flavour, cumin seeds are a very popular spice used for their strong aroma and bitter warm flavour. The most common consumption method is after frying or roasting. Roasted cumin seed powder is widely used.

Cumin has a very long list of uses: and seasons many dishes to help bring out the full flavour. Stews, soups, vegetables, rice, tempering and spice mixtures feature cumin seeds. The seed fried in butter brings a whole new flavour to any dish, especially meat, fish and vegetables.

Its helps in digestion and is advisable for pregnant women to treat nausea and

increase lactation. It stimulates the appetite and aids detoxification of the body. It also increases metabolism and can be used to treat boils.

## GINGER

Ginger is a popular ingredient in cooking, and especially in Asian and Indian cuisine. It has also been used for thousands of years for medicinal purpose. The root or underground stem of ginger plant can be consumed fresh, powdered, dried as a spice, in oil form, or as juice. Ginger is a part of the Zingiberaceae family, alongside cardamom and turmeric. It is commonly produced in India, Jamaica, Fiji, Indonesia and Australia. Ginger has long been used for culinary and medicinal purpose. Ginger can be used to make tea, chopped or crushed in curries and savoury dishes.

Ginger is known to possess antioxidant properties, and reportedly reduces inflammation and pain in joints. It also has potential prophylactic use in treating migraine headaches. It may also be effective in alleviating nausea and kill ovarian cancer cells. Ginger is good for motion sickness. The active ingredient in ginger retains potency even after it is processed.

## GARLIC

Garlic is a species in the onion genus. Its close relatives include the onion, shallot, leek, chive, and Chinese onion. Garlic is native to Central Asia and northeastern Iran, and has long been a common seasoning worldwide, with a history of several thousand years of human consumption and use.

Garlic is a great spice used to add a unique flavour to food. It helps fight heart disorders, high blood pressure and colds and coughs.

## CINNAMON

Cinnamon is a spice obtained from the inner bark of several tree species from the genus cinnamomum. Cinnamon is used mainly as an aromatic condiment and flavouring additive in a wide variety of cuisines, sweet and savoury dishes, breakfast cereals, snack foods, tea and traditional foods.

Cinnamon is praised for its ability to reduce inflammation, eliminate pain, manage diabetes, eliminate infections, reduce excess gas, and improve heart health. It also helps in increasing cognitive function, building strong bones and improving the health of eyes and skin.

## CARDAMOM

Cardamom is a spice made from the seed pods of various plants in the ginger family. The pods contain a number of seeds, but the entire cardamom pod can be used whole or ground. The seeds are small and black, while the pods differ in colour and size by species. There are two main types of cardamom, black and green cardamom; there is also white cardamom which is the bleached version of green cardamom. Cardamom is used to spice both sweet and savoury dishes. It is widely employed in Indian, Middle Eastern, Arabian, and Swedish cuisine. It comes in two types and is used as whole pods, seeds or ground.

The health benefits of cardamom include its ability to aid digestion, reduce spasms, lower blood pressure, increase the metabolism, improve circulation and increase frequency and volume of urination. It also provides many essential vitamins and minerals.

## CLOVES

Cloves are a spice made from the flower buds of an evergreen tree called Syzygium aromaticum. Clove flower buds are harvested in their immature state and then dried. Whole cloves are shaped like small, reddish brown spikes, usually around 1 centimetre in length, with a bulbous top. Cloves can be used whole or ground, and they have a very strong, pungent flavour and aroma.

Cloves have anti-microbial properties, which help in fighting oral diseases. They also are good for boosting the immune system and preventing bone health.

## MUSTARD SEEDS

Mustard seeds are packed with organic compounds and volatile oils that can boost your overall health. They are also a wonderful source of B-complex vitamins, which are essential for normal functioning of your organs.

## TIPS FOR COOKING WITH SPICES

Spices are key to creating flavours in any kitchen. If you are concerned about eating healthy, spices are even more important. One thing to keep in mind when cooking with spices is that they start to lose their flavour when they are ground. So whenever possible, it's best to grind our own spices immediately before using them.

**Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed**