

tana's habitat

 [Subscribe to Tana's newsletter!](#)

because life doesn't come with a manual

do

February 23, 2005

[Mi Casa, Su Casa](#) | [Chomp](#) | [Testosterone Tasks](#) | [Vim & Vigor](#) | [Gear](#) | [Shop](#) | [Refer-A-Friend](#)
[Book Drive](#) | [Porch Talk](#) | [Cash Money](#) | [Email Post](#) | [Show Off](#) | [Habi-chat Forum](#)

think



more chomp

- » [Herb-arrific!](#)
- » [WooHoo, Fondue!](#)
- » [Oh, Soy Good](#)
- » [Stocking Up](#)
- » [Food Pairings](#)

» [chomp archives](#)

chomp

Spice It Up!

By *Kay Daly*

[Spice Or Herb](#) | [Basics](#) | [Basics](#) | [And More Basics](#) | [Blends](#) | [Fancy](#) | [Storage](#) | [Recipes](#)

Daily dinner tasting drab? The key to pepping up your palate is spices -- those mysterious little jars and bottles you remember from mom's pantry. Don't be intimidated by these tongue teasers: A quick tour of the spice cabinet can take you from nutritional neophyte to galloping gourmet in no time.

Spice vs. Herb

In a nutshell, herbs and spices are nature's little flavoring additives. They both come from plants, but they differ in a few simple ways:

- Herbs are leaves, typically from plants that grow in a temperate climate. They can be used dried or fresh.
- Spices come from the other parts of the plant: roots, bark, seeds, flowers, fruits, and so forth. They're usually dried and ground before use. Spice plants tend to grow in more tropical climates.

Occasionally, you'll find a plant that straddles the line, such as anise or cilantro (known as coriander when it crosses the spice line). Use the leaves, and you've got herbs; use the other stuff, and you're spicing it up.

Dry vs. Fresh

Technically, you can substitute dried herbs for fresh and vice versa. Use about one-third the amount of dried herb as you would use of fresh (e.g., if the recipe calls for one cup of fresh dill, use 1/3 cup of dried dill). But be advised: the flavor will not quite be the same. The fresh herbs taste... well, fresh. There's a cleaner, more vivid flavor that dry just can't imitate. And dried herbs have a depth and complexity that fresh cannot match. So, yes you can substitute, but not if you're trying to wow anyone with your cooking.

next :

tell it to the 'tat

Got a great idea? Know something we don't know? Or maybe there's something you want to know? Write it up. Let us know. Submit an article, an idea or a plain old question. Let the cohabitation begin.

[about tana](#) | [about scott](#) | [advertise with us](#) | [press clippings](#) | [contact us](#)
[privacy](#) | [terms of use](#)

tana's habitat  [Subscribe to Tana's newsletter!](#)
because life doesn't come with a manual

do

February 23, 2005

[Mi Casa, Su Casa](#) | [Chomp](#) | [Testosterone Tasks](#) | [Vim & Vigor](#) | [Gear](#) | [Shop](#) | [Refer-A-Friend](#)

[Book Drive](#) | [Porch Talk](#) | [Cash Money](#) | [Emil Post](#) | [Show Off](#) | [Habi-chat Forum](#)

think



chomp

Spice It Up!

By Kay Daly

[Spice Or Herb](#) | [Basics](#) | [Basics](#) | [And More Basics](#) | [Blends](#) | [Fancy](#) | [Storage](#) | [Recipes](#)

The Basics

Stocking your spice cabinet can be costly and complicated. So start with a few basics -- the stuff you'll probably use the most -- then add more as you need them. Get started with:

Basil

Add this herb and you're Italian in a minute. You'll recognize this leaf from pastas and pizzas. Keep both fresh and dried versions on hand and use liberally.

Cayenne

Think the red color is just window dressing? No, it's a warning. This spice is hot, hot, hot. Hot as in Tabasco hot. Approach with caution.

Cinnamon

A spice staple, this old favorite makes you think of home. It comes ground or in sticks (the stick is actually a curl of dried bark). Start your spice collection with ground cinnamon; you can add sticks as you need them.

Crushed Red Pepper

You know this stuff from your favorite pizzeria; it's usually on the table in a shaker alongside the Parmesan cheese. Use it carefully; those little seeds can carry a wallop.

more chomp

- » [Herb-arrific!](#)
- » [WooHoo, Fondue!](#)
- » [Oh, Soy Good](#)
- » [Stocking Up](#)
- » [Food Pairings](#)

» [chomp archives](#)


next :

tell it to the 'tat

Got a great idea? Know something we don't know? Or maybe there's something you want to know? Write it up. Let us know. Submit an article, an idea or a plain old question. Let the cohabitation begin.

[about tana](#) | [about scott](#) | [advertise with us](#) | [press clippings](#) | [contact us](#)
[privacy](#) | [terms of use](#)

tana's habitat

 [Subscribe to Tana's newsletter!](#)

because life doesn't come with a manual

do

February 23, 2005

[Mi Casa, Su Casa](#) | [Chomp](#) | [Testosterone Tasks](#) | [Vim & Vigor](#) | [Gear](#) | [Shop](#) | [Refer-A-Friend](#)
[Book Drive](#) | [Porch Talk](#) | [Cash Money](#) | [Emil Post](#) | [Show Off](#) | [Habi-chat Forum](#)

think



more chomp

- » [Herb-arrific!](#)
- » [WooHoo, Fondue!](#)
- » [Oh, Soy Good](#)
- » [Stocking Up](#)
- » [Food Pairings](#)

» [chomp archives](#)

chomp

Spice It Up!

By *Kay Daly*

[Spice Or Herb](#) | [Basics](#) | [Basics](#) | [And More Basics](#) | [Blends](#) | [Fancy](#) | [Storage](#) | [Recipes](#)

Garlic

Clearly, any cook worth his or her salt needs garlic. Me, I prefer the pungent versatility of fresh, but if you're cooking for one or don't like your aromatics quite so aromatic, garlic power works just fine too, and is easier to control. Fresh garlic should be stored in a loosely covered container or in a brown paper bag. If it gets brown or starts to sprout, throw it out.

Ginger

It ranks with cinnamon as a must-have. In dried, ground form, it's warm, tangy, and comforting; as a freshly grated root, it'll clear your sinuses. Generally, you won't want to substitute fresh for ground or vice versa; it'd be a little like substituting your grandma for, say, Christina Aguilera.

Mustard

Clearly, if it's got a condiment named after it, it's useful enough to be in your pantry. Skip the seeds and go straight to ground. It's lovely added to any mayonnaise-based salads, and also works well in meat marinades. Later, if you're planning on adding pickling or coming to your culinary repertoire, you might want to invest in mustard seeds as well.

Nutmeg

This warm little friend ranks with cinnamon and ginger in the triumvirate of baking spices. Without these three there'd be no spice cookies, no pumpkin pie and no gingerbread. Purists say you should buy whole nutmeg and grate as you go. Lazy cooks like me just go with ground. The flavor may remind you of carnation flowers.



Bright Idea: Fresh ginger root may seem daunting, but it's worth it. You can pick up a root in the produce department of your friendly, neighborhood grocery store. Peel it with a vegetable peeler, and store it in the fridge in a jar of cooking sherry. That way, it'll stay moist and fresh, ready for grating. When you're ready to use it, just fish out your root, grate it with a cheese grater, and you're good to go. As an added bonus, the sherry in your jar will pick up the ginger flavor, and can be added to other recipes that call for wine.

next :

tell it to the 'tat

Got a great idea? Know something we don't know? Or maybe there's something you want to know? Write it up. Let us know. Submit an article, an idea or a plain old question. Let the cohabitation begin.

[about tana](#) | [about scott](#) | [advertise with us](#) | [press clippings](#) | [contact us](#)

[privacy](#) | [terms of use](#)

tana's habitat

[Subscribe to Tana's newsletter!](#)

because life doesn't come with a manual

do

February 23, 2005

[Mi Casa, Su Casa](#) | [Chomp](#) | [Testosterone Tasks](#) | [Vim & Vigor](#) | [Gear](#) | [Shop](#) | [Refer-A-Friend](#)

[Book Drive](#) | [Porch Talk](#) | [Cash Money](#) | [Emil Post](#) | [Show Off](#) | [Habi-chat Forum](#)

think



chomp

Spice It Up!

By Kay Daly

[Spice Or Herb](#) | [Basics](#) | [Basics](#) | [And More Basics](#) | [Blends](#) | [Fancy](#) | [Storage](#) | [Recipes](#)

Oregano

Just add oregano for instant pizza flavor. It appears in ground form or as dried whole leaves. The ground version can be pretty potent, so add it cautiously lest you overwhelm every other flavor.

Paprika

It puts the "Paprikash" in "Chicken Paprikash"? And though it's made of ground-dried peppers, this is not the fiery pepper of, say, cayenne. Expect a dark, smoky flavor that matches well with meats.

Parsley

Mainly used for garnish and color, our little green friend also supplies a subtle, grassy flavor. Use fresh parsley to wake up the dull colors of macaroni salad; sprinkle dried flakes on your mashed potatoes.

Pepper

A perennial favorite for adding a kick. To keep your kick a-kicking, buy your pepper in whole corns and grind as needed. Black pepper is good all-purpose stuff; if you feel fancy, add white pepper to your collection as well. It's got a cleaner, brighter flavor than its dark cousin.

next :

more chomp

- » [Herb-arrific!](#)
- » [WooHoo, Fondue!](#)
- » [Oh, Soy Good](#)
- » [Stocking Up](#)
- » [Food Pairings](#)

» [chomp archives](#)

tell it to the 'tat

Got a great idea? Know something we don't know? Or maybe there's something you want to know? Write it up. Let us know. Submit an article, an idea or a plain old question. Let the cohabitation begin.

[about tana](#) | [about scott](#) | [advertise with us](#) | [press clippings](#) | [contact us](#)
[privacy](#) | [terms of use](#)

tana's habitat

 [Subscribe to Tana's newsletter!](#)

because life doesn't come with a manual

do

February 23, 2005

[Mi Casa, Su Casa](#) | [Chomp](#) | [Testosterone Tasks](#) | [Vim & Vigor](#) | [Gear](#) | [Shop](#) | [Refer-A-Friend](#)

[Book Drive](#) | [Porch Talk](#) | [Cash Money](#) | [Emil Post](#) | [Show Off](#) | [Habi-chat Forum](#)

think



chomp

Spice It Up!

By Kay Daly

[Spice Or Herb](#) | [Basics](#) | [Basics](#) | [And More Basics](#) | [Blends](#) | [Fancy](#) | [Storage](#) | [Recipes](#)

Spice Blends

You may also want to stock you pantry with some pre-blended spices. These combinations can provide a handy, economical shortcut, especially if you're new to spice and don't want to take the time to get to know the herbs personally. Some must-haves:

Curry

Yep, curry is not a spice, it's a spice blend, and usually includes such savory goodies as cumin, mustard, coriander, ginger, cayenne, and the little-known fenugreek. You'll need it if you're actually making a curry, or simply adding an exotic edge to your chicken salad sandwich.

Chili Powder

With chili powder and ground beef, you're just a hop, skip and a jump from tacos. This blend typically combines chili, cumin, oregano, salt and other savories. One shake and you're south of the border.

Italian Blend

Frankly, if you've got basil, you've got Italian cooking covered, but a blend is good to have on hand as well. Generally, it consists of a variety of herbs such as basil, thyme, oregano in crumbled leaf form. A good blend can take your bottled pasta sauce from blah to bravo.

more chomp

- » [Herb-arrific!](#)
- » [WooHoo, Fondue!](#)
- » [Oh, Soy Good](#)
- » [Stocking Up](#)
- » [Food Pairings](#)

» [chomp archives](#)

So blends have their place. But please, for the love of all that is holy, do not purchase the pathetically named "pumpkin pie spice." You should have all the spices included on hand anyway (cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger), so why waste money and space?

next :

tell it to the 'tat

Got a great idea? Know something we don't know? Or maybe there's something you want to know? Write it up. Let us know. Submit an article, an idea or a plain old question. Let the cohabitation begin.

[about tana](#) | [about scott](#) | [advertise with us](#) | [press clippings](#) | [contact us](#)

[privacy](#) | [terms of use](#)

tana's habitat

 Subscribe to Tana's newsletter!

because life doesn't come with a manual

do

February 23, 2005

[Mi Casa, Su Casa](#) | [Chomp](#) | [Testosterone Tasks](#) | [Vim & Vigor](#) | [Gear](#) | [Shop](#) | [Refer-A-Friend](#)
[Book Drive](#) | [Porch Talk](#) | [Cash Money](#) | [Emil Post](#) | [Show Off](#) | [Habi-chat Forum](#)



more chomp

- » [Herb-arrific!](#)
- » [WooHoo, Fondue!](#)
- » [Oh, Soy Good](#)
- » [Stocking Up](#)
- » [Food Pairings](#)

» [chomp archives](#)

chomp

Spice It Up!

By Kay Daly

[Spice Or Herb](#) | [Basics](#) | [Basics](#) | [And More Basics](#) | [Blends](#) | [Fancy](#) | [Storage](#) | [Recipes](#)

Getting Fancy

Once your spice cabinet is established, you may want to branch out to some more off-the-beaten path flavorings. Get gourmet with a few of these adventurous additives:

Anise

Love that licorice? Anise is for you. It's sweet, almost peppery flavor gets the salivary glands going. The ground version can be a bit overwhelming; I like using whole seeds for little bursts of flavor.

Bay Leaves

From the laurel tree, this long, narrow leaf is great in stews and soups. Typically, you throw the whole leaf in, let the stew simmer, then remove the bay before serving. Otherwise, you may spend the whole meal chewing bay leaf. It's the best choice for rescuing your pea soup from blandness.

Cardamom

Subtler than cinnamon, this is another "fresh from the oven" spice. Warm and friendly, but with a surprisingly soft feel, cardamom is the dominant flavor in Middle Eastern coffee. Try substituting it where you'd usually use cinnamon. It's great in coffee cake.

Cumin

Nothing says "Mexican food" like cumin, though it's also a favorite flavor in Middle Eastern cuisine and Indian curries. It has a strong, musky flavor that goes well with chicken, beef and, for you veggies, garbanzo beans.

Dill

It's not just for pickles anymore. Dill, whether fresh or dried, says, "Spring is in the air." Paired with lemon, it's a lovely addition to dips and dressings, and a classic accompaniment for salmon.

Fennel

Flavor-wise, this is the second cousin to anise, as suitable to meats as anise is to sweets. One bite and you'll recognize it from your favorite Italian sausage. Like anise, fennel can be used ground or as whole seeds which are papery and fun to chew.

Rosemary

These little leaves look like pine needles, and the flavor has a fresh, strong flavor that's not unlike your favorite fir. Half the fun with rosemary is the texture; since the needles don't crumble too well, you get an herb you can really sink your teeth into.

next :

tell it to the 'tat

Got a great idea? Know something we don't know? Or maybe there's something you want to know? Write it up. Let us know. Submit an article, an idea or a plain old question. Let the cohabitation begin.

tana's habitat
because life doesn't come with a manual

 [Subscribe to Tana's newsletter!](#)

do

February 23, 2005

[Mi Casa, Su Casa](#) | [Chomp](#) | [Testosterone Tasks](#) | [Vim & Vigor](#) | [Gear](#) | [Shop](#) | [Refer-A-Friend](#)

[Book Drive](#) | [Porch Talk](#) | [Cash Money](#) | [Email Post](#) | [Show Off](#) | [Habi-chat Forum](#)

think



chomp

Spice It Up!

By Kay Daly

[Spice Or Herb](#) | [Basics](#) | [Basics](#) | [And More Basics](#) | [Blends](#) | [Fancy](#) | [Storage](#) | [Recipes](#)

Buying, Storing, Using

By now, you should've developed a spice shopping list. But before you run out to the grocery store, check around. Name-brand, pre-bottled spices are notoriously overpriced. Gourmet stores, bulk food stores, health food stores and (gasp!) spice shops will often sell spices loose and in bulk for much, much lower prices than you'll see in the baking aisle of your local supermarket.

Ditto for fresh herbs. Bought pre-cut and pre-packaged in the grocery store, they can be pretty pricey. What's more, you'll typically get more than you can possibly use before they wilt into oblivion. As a solution, consider growing your own. Many supermarkets sell live plants right there in the produce section; basil, chives and rosemary are common. With a staple like basil, you can't go wrong by growing your own, and they're pretty hard to kill (trust me, I've tried).

Once you've got your goodies home, take time to find the right storage space. Spices and dried herbs don't like light, air or moisture, so seal them up and tuck them away in a cool, dark, dry place. If they start to fade, or if the scent doesn't knock you over when you open the jar, your spices have passed on to the great beyond. Give them a decent burial, and hie thee to the spice store for a replacement. Fresh herbs, unless they're still on the plant, should lounge in the produce drawer of your fridge.

next :

more chomp

- » [Herb-arrific!](#)
- » [WooHoo, Fondue!](#)
- » [Oh, Soy Good](#)
- » [Stocking Up](#)
- » [Food Pairings](#)

» [chomp archives](#)

tell it to the 'tat

Got a great idea? Know something we don't know? Or maybe there's something you want to know? Write it up. Let us know. Submit an article, an idea or a plain old question. Let the cohabitation begin.

[about tana](#) | [about scott](#) | [advertise with us](#) | [press clippings](#) | [contact us](#)
[privacy](#) | [terms of use](#)

tana's habitat

[Subscribe to Tana's newsletter!](#)

because life doesn't come with a manual

do

February 23, 2005

[Mi Casa, Su Casa](#) | [Chomp](#) | [Testosterone Tasks](#) | [Vim & Vigor](#) | [Gear](#) | [Shop](#) | [Refer-A-Friend](#)

[Book Drive](#) | [Porch Talk](#) | [Cash Money](#) | [Emil Post](#) | [Show Off](#) | [Habi-chat Forum](#)

think



more chomp

- » [Herb-arrific!](#)
- » [WooHoo, Fondue!](#)
- » [Oh, Soy Good](#)
- » [Stocking Up](#)
- » [Food Pairings](#)

» [chomp archives](#)

chomp

Spice It Up!

By *Kay Daly*

[Spice Or Herb](#) | [Basics](#) | [Basics](#) | [And More Basics](#) | [Blends](#) | [Fancy](#) | [Storage](#) | [Recipes](#)

Quick Spice Cookery

Think you need to find a ton of recipes before you can give your new spice cabinet a test drive? Think again. There are a lot of quick and easy ways to inject new spices into old favorites:

Coffee

Approximate the flavor of gourmet by shaking some **cinnamon** in your coffee beans after grinding. Percolate per usual.

Sugar cookies

Add **ground cardamom** (a teaspoon ought to do it) to the dough, or fold in **whole anise seeds** for a new twist on an old favorite.

Rice

When making rice, try adding a couple of tablespoons of **dried dill** prior to boiling for a Middle Eastern treat. For an Indian variation, try a teaspoon of **curry powder**.

Tomato salad

With **fresh basil** on hand, you can make a simple and elegant salad. Just slice ripe tomatoes and fresh mozzarella (the kind that comes packed in water); layer the slices with whole leaves of fresh basil and drizzle with extra virgin olive oil.

Scrambled eggs

Beat in some **crushed red pepper** (not too much!) for *huevos en fuego*.

Potatoes

What could be better than roasted new potatoes? Roasted new potatoes baked with a sprinkling of **dried rosemary**. You'll think you've died and gone to pot roast heaven.

Warm milk

It's even more soothing with a little **cinnamon** or **nutmeg** swirled in while it's warming.

Now your pantry is stocked, and you've got a roadmap for some fresh spice cookery. It's time to mix, match and dazzle your palate with a world of new flavors.

tell it to the 'tat

Got a great idea? Know something we don't know? Or maybe there's something you want to know? Write it up. Let us know. Submit an article, an idea or a plain old question. Let the cohabitation begin.

[about tana](#) | [about scott](#) | [advertise with us](#) | [press clippings](#) | [contact us](#)
[privacy](#) | [terms of use](#)