

# HERBS

## **Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)**

### **Description**

Basil is a herb with spicy overtones of aniseed and is strongly associated with Italian cooking. Basil complements - tomatoes, green vegetables, salads, soups, eggs, fish, cheese, lamb, pizza and pasta sauces. Basil is delicious with tomatoes, cooked or as a salad.

### **Did You Know?**

Basil has a strong history of reverence and loathing. Its name is Greek for "King" and it is revered as a sacred herb in the Hindu religion. However, in Europe during the Middle Ages it was believed that scorpions would breed under pots of Basil and just to smell Basil would form a scorpion in the brain. Basil is known as the tomato herb because of their affinity. There are over 150 varieties of Basil.

### **Quality**

Basil should have a good fresh green color preserved by careful drying at temperatures of less than 110°F. The dried herb should retain its aniseed flavor. Methyl Chavicol is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## **Bay Leaves (*Laurus nobilis*)**

### **Description**

Bay Leaves have an astringent, spicy flavor similar to freshly ground pepper but without the heat. Dried Bay Leaves have a more intense and less bitter flavor than fresh. To release the volatile oils encapsulated in the dried leaf, tear or break the leaves before adding to your cooking. Remove before serving. For decoration leave whole.

### **Did You Know?**

The bay tree grows wild and the leaves are harvested by cutting the branches and drying them in the shade. In ancient Greece and Rome the branches were used as wreaths to crown the victors in battle, sport and the arts. We still use the term poet laureate. The word bacalaureate means laurel berries and signifies the successful completion of one's studies.

### **Quality**

Good quality Bay Leaves should be large and whole with clean unblemished leaves of a good green color. Eugenol is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## **Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)**

### **Description**

Chives have a mild, fresh, onion flavor and bright green color. Chives complement - eggs, cheese, potatoes, salads, soups, fish and chicken and are excellent as a garnish.

### **Did You Know?**

Chives grow in the cooler Northern hemisphere. Dutch farmers have even been know to use them as fodder for their cows to produce chive flavored milk. Chives are cut in July before they flower and are processed quickly to avoid deterioration of their delicate flavor. Chives, together with Parsley, Tarragon and Chervil make up the classic French "Fine Herbes".

### **Quality**

The delicate flavor of Chives is preserved by quick freeze-drying immediately following cutting and processing. Their color should be bright green.

## **Coriander Leaf (*Coriandrum sativum*)**

### **Description**

The flavor of Coriander Leaf is strong, pungent and earthy. It is quite different from the aromatic, citrus flavor of Coriander Seed. Although both are from the same plant they are not interchangeable. Coriander Leaf is used extensively in Asian, Oriental and Latin American cooking. Coriander Leaf complements - chicken, fish, curries, rice, tomatoes, Thai, Indonesian, Chinese and South American dishes.

### **Did You Know?**

Coriander Leaf is the world's most popular herb. Whilst it is not often found in European cooking, it is used extensively in Asian, Oriental, Middle Eastern and Latin American dishes.

### **Quality**

Coriander Leaves should have a good green color. The flavor and aroma of the dried leaves become more apparent once added to the cooked dish

## **Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)**

### **Description**

Dill has a fresh, sweet, anise-like flavor and aroma. Dill complements - chicken, fish, minced meat, vegetables, eggs, cheese, salads, soups, pickles and is used as a garnish. Dill is used to flavor baby cucumbers in Dill pickles. Dill is an excellent seasoning for seafood, fish and new potatoes. It has a special affinity with salmon, both fresh and cured, as in gravadlax.

### **Did You Know?**

The word "Dill" comes from an old Norse word meaning 'to lull' due to their belief in the herb's soothing and sedative effect, especially for crying babies suffering from colic. The Greeks used Dill as a remedy for hiccups. In the middle ages Dill was used in many magic potions, including a protection against witch craft.

### **Quality**

Dill should have a fresh green color and mild flavor. D-Carvone is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## **Marjoram & Oregano (*Marjorana hortensis* & *Origanum vulgare*)**

### **Description**

Marjoram is a sweet-scented herb characteristic of the Mediterranean. Marjoram complements - lamb, chicken, veal, pork, fish, pizza, tomatoes, vegetables, cheese, eggs, stuffings, Italian and Mexican dishes.

### **Did You Know?**

In Greek 'Oregano' means 'Joy of the mountains' from where it is gathered. It is used extensively in Greece and its many varieties are known as 'rigani'. Marjoram is a traditional herb in Bouquet Garni.

### **Quality**

Both Marjoram and Oregano should have a good color, even sized leaf pieces and fresh aromatic aroma and flavor. Carvacrol is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## Mint (*Mentha spicata*)

### Description

Mint has a strong refreshing flavor which adds an extra dimension to both sweet and savory dishes. Mint complements - lamb, veal, rabbit, new potatoes, peas, vegetables, salads, tomatoes, soups, jelly, fresh fruits. Whilst traditionally used in the UK as a summer herb for flavoring lamb, new potatoes and peas, Mint is used in many dishes from the Middle East. It is one of the ingredients in Tunisian hot chili sauce, often used as a table sauce, or as an ingredient in meat and vegetable stews.

### Did You Know?

The Latin name 'mentha' comes from 'menthe', a charming nymph who was changed into the Mint plant by Proserpine, the wife of Pluto, in a fit of jealousy. Mint symbolizes hospitality. It repels rats and mice, relieves wasp stings and was used by the Romans to whiten teeth.

### Quality

Dried Mint should have a good green color and a strong Mint flavor. If kept well sealed and away from sunlight it will not lose these properties.

## Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

### Description

Parsley is probably the most popular and versatile herb available. It has a very mild, fresh flavor. Parsley complements - lamb, chicken, ham, casseroles, fish, vegetables, salads, egg and cheese dishes, soups, sauces.

### Did You Know?

The Greeks used Parsley to crown victors at the Isthmian Games. It was also a symbol of death and scattered over tombs. The Romans were the first to use Parsley as food and ate it like lettuce. The Romans believed Parsley worn as wreaths around their necks prevented drunkenness. Parsley has always been linked to the occult. It was believed that the seed germinated slowly because it had to go down to the devil and back seven times before it would grow. An old saying goes 'Where Parsley thrives, the missus is master'.

### Quality

Parsley should have a good fresh green color, even leaf particles and a mild aroma.

## Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

### Description

Rosemary is the hard, needle-shaped leaves of a small evergreen shrub. It has a distinctive pine-wood aroma and a strong bittersweet flavor. Rosemary complements - lamb, pork, chicken, oily fish, game, tomato sauce, vegetables, soups, marinades.

### Did You Know?

The Latin name 'Ros Maris' means 'Dew of the Sea', as the plant grows well by the seaside. Legend has it that the Virgin Mary, fleeing from Herod's soldiers, hung her cloak on a Rosemary bush one night. In the morning the white flowers had turned blue under her cloak. From then on, the herb became known as 'Rose of Mary'. In ancient Greece it was believed that Rosemary fortified the brain and refreshed the memory. Students wore it in their hair during examinations to improve their memory. Associated with remembrance, Rosemary was used at weddings and funerals. Rosemary is believed to grow well in the garden of a happy household. For a refreshing bath add a handful of Rosemary, tied in muslin, to the water. An infusion of Rosemary is said to be calming on the nerves. Rosemary is an antiseptic and works well as a breath freshener.

### Quality

Rosemary retains its flavor best as whole 'needles' but as these can be difficult to chew, Schwartz Rosemary is chopped for convenience into smaller particles. Cineole is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## **Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)**

### **Description**

Sage is the pale green leaves of an evergreen shrub. Its strong, fresh flavor makes it a popular culinary herb, but it has always been well known for its medicinal properties. Sage complements - pork, veal, game, poultry, sausages, vegetables, salads, onion, cheese, eggs, stuffings, coatings.

### **Did You Know?**

It was believed that Sage strengthened the memory, hence a sage or wise man would have a long memory. Sage tea is believed to make a good tonic and blood cleanser. Used as a mouthwash Sage is said to freshen the breath and help in alleviating bleeding gums. A Sage bath helps ease rheumatism and aching limbs.

### **Quality**

Sage should be silvery-gray and strongly aromatic. It has a medicinal pine-wood flavor. Thujone is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## **Tarragon (*Artemesia dracunculus*)**

### **Description**

The long narrow leaves of Tarragon have a strong, spicy, anise flavor. Tarragon complements - chicken, fish, veal, lamb, eggs, salads, sauces, vegetables, vinegar, soups, mayonnaise. Use Tarragon sparingly as it can overpower other ingredients and take on a bitter taste.

### **Did You Know?**

The name Tarragon is probably a corruption of the French word 'estragon' meaning 'little dragon' as the roots curl around like a dragon's tail. Tarragon was used to cure the bites of dogs and poisonous snakes. Tarragon is one of the classic French herbs and is a favourite flavoring for white wine vinegar. Tarragon is a stimulant to the appetite.

### **Quality**

The quality of Tarragon is determined by its good green color, a strong anise flavor and volatile oil content. Methyl chavicol is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## **Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)**

### **Description**

Thyme is a small, woody stemmed plant with tiny gray-green leaves and pretty little purple flowers. It is at its most aromatic when grown in hot, sunny, dry conditions and a light sandy soil. Thyme complements - chicken, lamb, beef, offal, rabbit, turkey, vegetables, fish, cheese, eggs, soups, stews, & casseroles.

### **Did You Know?**

Records of Thyme date back to ancient Greece where it symbolized courage. Roman soldiers bathed in water infused with Thyme to gain vigor, courage and strength. Thyme has antiseptic qualities. It also aids the digestion of fatty food. Laid amongst clothes it is said to keep fleas and moths away.

### **Quality**

Good quality Thyme should contain very little twig or stalk. Its aroma and flavor should be strong and fresh. Thymol is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

# SPICES

## Allspice (*Pimenta dioica*)

### Description

Allspice is the dried, unripe berry of a tree indigenous to the Caribbean and Central America. As its name implies it tastes of a mixture of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. Allspice complements - beef, pork, chicken, sausages, fish, cheese, pickles, stewed fruit, cakes, biscuits.

### Did You Know?

Columbus introduced Allspice to Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It is one of the few spices native to the Western hemisphere and, although many attempts have been made to grow Allspice in other parts of the world, it remains the only spice commercially produced exclusively in this area. Allspice was originally used by American Indians to preserve meat and fish. The term buccaneer comes from the Allspice cured meats of the Arawak Indians, called boucan, adopted by the pirates using the island of Jamaica as a base for raiding shipping.

### Quality

Allspice berries from Jamaica have the highest oil content and a dark reddish-brown color. Eugenol is the principal flavor-giving volatile oil.

## Caraway Seed (*Carum carvi*)

### Description

Caraway Seed has a warm, pungent, slightly bitter flavor with aniseed overtones. Caraway complements - cabbage, potatoes, onion, carrots, coleslaw, sauerkraut, pork, goulash, dumplings, cheese, pickles, cakes, biscuits, rye bread.

### Did You Know?

Caraway aids the digestion. Caraway was known in England from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. It was popular in seed cake and breads as well as with cabbage and bean dishes. Caraway oil is used in liqueurs, perfume and mouthwashes.

### Quality

Caraway Seeds should have a uniform shape and consistent creamy brown color with no stem or chaff content. Carvone is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## Cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*)

### Description

Cardamom pods contain highly aromatic citrus-like, floral flavored seeds with menthol undertones. Either crush the pod lightly and discard after cooking, or open and remove the seeds which can then be used whole or ground. The outer green pod is not eaten. Cardamom complements - fish, meat, curries, rice, fruit, pastries, meringue, cream, yogurt, pickles.

### Did You Know?

Cardamom is known as the Queen of spices (pepper is the King). Cardamom is said to have a cooling effect on the body. Chewing Cardamom seeds disguises the smell of alcohol on the breath. Cardamom is renowned as a powerful aphrodisiac.

### Quality

India and Guatemala produce excellent quality Cardamom. The pale green pods should be plump, unblemished and filled with dark, often sticky black or brown seed. Cineole is the principal flavor-giving volatile oil.

## **Chillies (*Capsicum frutescens*)**

### **Description**

Chillies are the pods of an annual plant of the Capsicum family. There are many different varieties whose subtleties of flavor are as varied as their heat levels which range from mild to fiery hot. The majority of the heat in Chillies comes from the membranes. To reduce the heat remove before cooking. Chillies are widely used in Indian, Mexican and South East Asian cookery.

### **Did You Know?**

There are over 200 identified varieties of Chili grown throughout the tropics. In addition there are many local varieties which have not yet been documented. Chillies contain capsaicin which gives them their fiery heat. Depending upon the variety, the heat scale measured in Scoville units, can range from 0-300,000. Chillies were introduced to Europe and India in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries following their discovery in Central America. Explorers in the New World mistook the fiery heat of the Chili (Capsicum) for pepper (Piper nigrum) and, therefore, named their discovery Pepper, to the confusion of future generations. The sweet bell pepper, potatoes and tomatoes are all members of the same family as chili peppers.

### **Quality**

Dried whole Chillies should be a deep rich red color and fairly pliable. Cayenne Pepper should have a bright red color and fresh, pungent smell. Schwartz Hot and Mild Chili Powders provide an especially harmonious blend of flavors brought about by the special Schwartz caramelization process.

## **Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum*)**

### **Description**

Cinnamon is the peeled and curled inner bark of a tropical evergreen tree. It has a warm, sweet, woody aroma. Cinnamon complements - beef, pork, curries, spinach, stewed fruits, sweet and savory rice, cakes, biscuits, puddings, pickles, mulled wine, chocolate.

### **Did You Know?**

The best Cinnamon grows within sight of the sea in a sub-tropical climate. Before the source of spices was discovered by Europeans, the Arabs maintained their monopoly of the spice trade by claiming that Cinnamon was harvested from the nests of ferocious birds and had to be gathered under their attack.

### **Quality**

Cinnamon Sticks should be an even, soft brown color and quite slim. A pale colored bark shows the finest quality. Whole Cinnamon Sticks have only a faint aroma but once broken or ground the volatile oils are released giving off their powerfully warm, sweet, pungent flavors. Cinnamic Aldehyde is the principal flavor-giving oil.

## **Cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum*)**

### **Description**

Cloves are the dried, unopened flower buds of a small evergreen tree. They have a strong sweet, pungent flavor. Cloves can have an overpowering flavor if used to excess and are often combined with other spices, as in Chinese Five Spice, Garam Masala and Mixed Spice, where they give warmth and body to dishes.

### **Did You Know?**

The name Clove is derived from the French word *clou* meaning nail, which is the shape that the bud and stem resemble. In Indonesia half of the Clove production is mixed with tobacco to produce Kretek cigarettes. Cloves are known to have antiseptic properties and their smell is often associated with the dentist. Their use as a preservative in pickles and spiced dishes is well documented. At the time of the early Chinese civilization commoners chewed Cloves to sweeten their breath before talking to the emperor. The Chinese also used Cloves as a mild anesthetic for toothache.

### **Quality**

Cloves should be large, plump and oily with a warm, reddish brown color. The majority of the flower buds should be intact. Eugenol is the principal flavor-giving volatile oil.

## **Coriander Seed (*Coriandrum sativum*)**

### **Description**

Coriander seed has a mild, sweet, slightly pungent, citrus-like flavor with a hint of sage. Coriander complements - pork, curries, Middle Eastern dishes, vegetables, stewed fruit, chutney, pickles, cakes, biscuits, lentils.

### **Did You Know?**

Both the seeds and leaves (see Coriander Leaf-Cilantro) are used in cooking but are not interchangeable as they have distinctly different flavors. Coriander is known to have been used in Egypt since 1550BC for culinary and medicinal purposes. India is the largest producer of Coriander which is used extensively in curry powders.

### **Quality**

Coriander Seeds should be a uniform, light brown color, an even size and unblemished. D-Linalool is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## **Cumin Seed (*Cuminum cyminum*)**

### **Description**

Cumin has an earthy, pungent, aromatic flavor which is slightly bitter but not hot. Cumin complements - chicken, lamb, cheese, vegetables, rice, lentils, curries, Mexican dishes, tomato sauce, bread.

### **Did You Know?**

Cumin was used by the Romans in place of Pepper. It was also ground to a paste and spread on bread. Cumin is said to keep lovers faithful and was often used in love potions. It has been used as a condiment in England since the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was a taxable import into London from 1419.

### **Quality**

Cumin Seed should be even sized and yellowish-brown with a strong, earthy aroma when ground. It should be carefully cleaned and sorted to remove extraneous matter. Cuminaldehyde is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## **Fennel Seed (*Foeniculum vulgare*)**

### **Description**

Fennel Seeds are oval, light brown and have a subtle, sweet anise-like flavor. Fennel complements - fish, pork, veal, potatoes, rice, eggs, cheese, pickles, apples.

### **Did You Know?**

Ancient Chinese and Hindus used Fennel as a remedy for snakebites and scorpion stings. In the Middle Ages it was hung over doorways to ward off evil spirits. Indians chew Fennel Seeds at the end of a meal to aid digestion and freshen the breath. Greek athletes ate Fennel to keep up their strength and keep down their weight.

### **Quality**

Good quality Fennel Seed should be clean with an anise-like flavor and aroma. The color of the seeds ranges from yellow to greenish-brown. Anethole is the principal flavor - giving volatile oil.

## **Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*)**

### **Description**

Fenugreek has a strong, pungent aroma and a bitter 'curry-like' flavor that often dominates curry powders. Fenugreek complements - curries, pickles, chutneys.

### **Did You Know?**

Fenugreek was used as a conditioning powder to give horses a glossy coat, and was reputed to cure baldness in men. Harem women ate roasted Fenugreek to develop a buxom figure. The Egyptians used Fenugreek for incense and embalming. Made into a paste and spread over the body, Fenugreek is supposed to reduce fever. Fenugreek restores nitrogen in the soil as it comes from the pea family.

### **Quality**

Ground Fenugreek has a warm, yellowish-brown color with a strong curry-like flavor.

## **Garlic (*Allium sativum*)**

### **Description**

Garlic is one of the most widely used spices in the world. Dried garlic can usually be used in place of fresh and is more convenient. These fine granules of pure garlic give savory dishes a mouth-watering flavor without the texture of fresh chopped garlic.

### **Did You Know?**

The workers building the Pyramids ate Garlic to keep up their strength and avoid illness. Nowadays, Garlic bread is the UK's most popular restaurant starter. At one time, Garlic was said to keep vampires away! Garlic is highly antiseptic - it purifies and thins the blood. Garlic is said to be an antidote to drunkenness. The chlorophyll in Parsley helps clear the breath of Garlic odours.

### **Quality**

Blends incorporating both garlic and onion readily absorb moisture. They should be kept away from steam and stored in well sealed containers. However, if they do become solid in the jar just stir to loosen the granules before using.

## **Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)**

### **Description**

Ginger has a warm, sweet aroma and a hot, biting flavor. Ginger complements - curries, stir-fries, ham, gammon, fish, fruit, biscuits, cakes, puddings, pickles, chutney, Oriental and South East Asian dishes.

### **Did You Know?**

Ginger is a warming spice said to promote sweating and relieve colds. A teaspoon of Ginger in warm water is said to guard against travel sickness. Ginger is believed to be an aid to digestion and to help stimulate the circulation. Ginger was introduced to England before 1066 and was used mainly as a baking spice. Elizabeth I had a fancy for gingerbread which her cook made into the likeness of her courtiers, the prototype for our traditional gingerbread man.

### **Quality**

Ground Ginger should have a strongly spicy flavor and pale cream color. Gingerols are the principal flavor constituents.



## **Juniper Berries (*Juniperus communis*)**

### **Description**

Juniper berries are the deep purple fruit of the Juniper bush. They have a bitter sweet, pine flavor with a peppery aftertaste. Juniper Berries complement - beef, game, pork, venison, cabbage, terrines.

### **Did You Know?**

Juniper Berries can take 3 years to ripen on the bush. Juniper gives its distinctive flavor to gin and other spirits. Cooks in the mountainous regions of Italy, France and Germany use Juniper to flavor rich game dishes. Although Juniper grows in Britain we do not have many traditional culinary uses for it. However, it adds an excellent flavor to game, pâté and marinades. It is believed to be a diuretic and anti-inflammatory.

### **Quality**

The berries should be large, round and plump with a deep purple color and slight dusty bloom.

## **Mace (*Myristica fragrans*)**

### **Description**

Mace is the scarlet lacy covering which surrounds the hard black shell of the nutmeg. The flavor is aromatic, sweet, warm and rich. Mace complements - beef, seafood, veal, vegetables, potatoes, tomato and white sauce, quiches, stewed fruit, biscuits, cakes, milk puddings.

### **Did You Know?**

Nutmegs form a major crop for the island of Grenada, which is often called the Nutmeg Isle. The Nutmeg comes well packaged - first in a hard shell, then covered by the network of Mace and finally with a fleshy outer shell, similar to an apricot. This part of the fruit is used locally for making jam. Connecticut in the USA was known as the Nutmeg State because Yankee peddlers sold whittled wooden Nutmegs to housewives as the genuine spice. Nutmeg can cause hallucinations when eaten in large quantities. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nutmeg was considered a cure-all.

### **Quality**

Nutmegs should have a light brown color and strong aromatic flavor. Schwartz special milling process preserves the flavor - giving volatile oils. Nutmeg is very oily causing the Ground Nutmeg to clump together in the jar. Just shake to loosen before using. Mace has a brighter orange color and nutmeg-like flavor.

## **Mustard Seed (*Sinapsis alba*)**

### **Description**

Mustard seed has a clean fresh aroma and pungent biting flavor. Mustard Seed complements - pork, kidneys, veal, rabbit, fish, vegetables, cheese, pickles. The pungency of Mustard only develops with the addition of water. Heat reduces this pungency and, therefore, to retain the heat it is best to add Mustard towards the end of cooking.

### **Did You Know?**

Mustard has been used as a condiment for thousands of years. For poor people it was the one spice with which they could afford to enliven their bland food.

### **Quality**

Mustard Seed should have a uniform golden color with a fresh, sharp flavor. Allyl isothiocyanate is the principal flavor-giving volatile oil.

## **Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*)**

### **Description**

Nutmeg is the seed of a tropical tree and has an aromatic, sweet, warm and rich flavor. Nutmeg complements - beef, seafood, veal, vegetables, potatoes, tomato and white sauce, quiches, stewed fruit, biscuits, cakes, milk puddings.

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## **Paprika (*Capsicum annuum*)**

### **Description**

Paprika is a deep red, slightly earthy flavored spice made from the dried and ground sweet pepper. Paprika complements - pork, chicken, veal, vegetables, potatoes, cheese and egg dishes.

### **Did You Know?**

Although related to the hot chili pepper the cultivation of this plant in the Northern hemisphere has eliminated the capsaicin content which provides the heat in chili peppers. Paprika was introduced to Hungary by the conquering Turks in 1699. Paprika is a rich source of Vitamin C.

### **Quality**

Paprika should have a bright red color and a mild, sweet, earthy aroma. Pungency can vary according to the type.

## **Pepper (*Piper nigrum*)**

### **Description**

Peppercorns are the berries of a tropical vine. They have a warm pungent slightly nutmeg flavor and a hot, biting taste. To give a spicy flavor and heat, sprinkle into all savory dishes at the end of cooking or at the table.

### **Did You Know?**

Pepper is known as the 'King of spices', being the most widely used spice in the West. The trade in Pepper and other spices was the major cause of medieval wars and the main reason for world exploration. In the Middle Ages, Peppercorns were even used as currency. Black Peppercorns are the green unripe berries which become black and shriveled when dried in the sun. To produce White Pepper the outer skin of the ripening berry is removed and the hard core is then dried in the sun. Green Peppercorns are the green berries picked and dried artificially to retain their color. (Pink Peppercorns are the berries of a tropical bush). Good quality Black Peppercorns will keep for many years. Their warm pungent flavor is released on grinding and is enhanced by heat. However, once ground the volatile oils soon evaporate so add freshly ground Pepper at the table or towards the end of cooking. Green Peppercorns are the world's newest spice, only introduced in 1971. They are milder than black or white. Pepper stimulates the digestive juices, increases the appetite and aids digestion.

### **Quality**

Black Peppercorns should be large, even in size and a deep rich brown color. They should be hard and free from stalks and dust.

## **Saffron (*Crocus sativus*)**

### **Description**

Saffron, the world's most expensive spice, is the dried red stigmas of the autumn-flowering crocus. It has a unique and distinctively pungent, honey-like flavor and aroma. Saffron complements - rice, chicken, fish, cakes, buns, curries, potatoes, yogurt, cream. Use sparingly as a little goes a long way. For an even flavor and color, steep a pinch of crushed Saffron strands in a little hot water before adding both to the dish. Add crushed Saffron strands directly to the water when cooking rice.

### **Did You Know?**

More than 75,000 crocus are needed to produce a pound (450g) of Saffron. The word 'Saffron' comes from the Arabic 'Za'faran' meaning yellow. Saffron Waldon in Essex was so named because of its cultivation of Saffron for over 400 years. The spice has always been expensive and, therefore, open to adulteration. In the Middle Ages, punishment for this crime was extreme. In 1444, a German named Findeker was ordered to be burned at the stake for adulterating Saffron. The use of Saffron in Cornish cooking is believed to have originated from trade with the Phoenicians for Cornish tin.

### **Quality**

Saffron can easily be adulterated; there is no such thing as cheap Saffron. The stigmas should be a deep vibrant red color and have a strong clinging aroma.

## **Sesame Seed (*Sesamum indicum*)**

### **Description**

Sesame is the nutty flavored, normally cream colored, oval seed of the fruit pod of a tropical tree. Sesame Seeds complement - chicken, stir-fries, dips, bread rolls, biscuits, pastry, salads.

### **Did You Know?**

The password 'Open Sesame' from the tale of Ali Baba was probably inspired by the sharp popping sound and spring-like action of a ripe Sesame pod opening. Sesame Seed is often cultivated for its oil which is excellent in cooking. The Babylonians made cakes, wine and brandy from Sesame Seeds and used the oil for cooking and toiletries. Sesame Seeds are believed to be slightly laxative.

### **Quality**

Sesame Seeds should be pearly white and even sized with a fresh nutty flavor.

## **Vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*)**

### **Description**

Vanilla is a long, slender, black seed pod. It has a sweet, slightly smoky aroma and taste and is one of the world's most popular flavorings for sweet dishes. Vanilla complements - cakes, puddings, cream, ice cream, rice puddings, pancakes, custard.

### **Did You Know?**

The Aztec Indians in Mexico used Vanilla Pods to flavor their chocolate drink Xoco-latl. Vanilla Pods are picked green when they have no scent. The lengthy curing process, which develops Vanillas fragrant aroma, is one reason for its high cost. Good quality Vanilla Pods give an even better flavor than essence and can be re-used many times. Vanilla was believed to be a tonic for the brain.

### **Quality**

Vanilla Pods should be a rich, deep brown color, somewhat wrinkled in appearance but still supple and resilient. The complex, but subtle, fruity 'bouquet' develops with age and is long lasting. Vanillin is the primary flavor constituent of vanilla beans.