

SPICE BLENDS

Cajun Spice

Ingredients: paprika, black pepper, cumin, mustard seed, cayenne pepper, thyme, oregano, garlic, onion, salt

Chefs in New Orleans keep their Cajun seasoning recipes under wraps, and have used their secrets to build the city's reputation as the spicy culinary Mecca of the American South. These Creole-inspired mixtures use ground spices and herbs, rather than whole, fresh ones. Cajun chefs have made these concoctions famous by rubbing them on fish and adding them liberally to gumbos, but you can also sprinkle them on anything from potatoes to salad.

Harissa

Ingredients: chilies, cumin, coriander seed, cloves, olive oil, salt

The spicy Tunisian sauce called *harissa* is often the base of North African soups and stews that are served with couscous, a small pearl-shaped pasta. *Harissa* is also commonly used on traditional Italian pasta, an influence from Tunisia's nearby European neighbor. If you're fixing a cold meal, *harissa* makes for a zingy addition to sandwiches.

Herbes de Provence

Ingredients: chervil, tarragon, savory, marjoram, rosemary, thyme, fennel

This mixture is the signature of southern French cooking. The Mediterranean climate of Provence makes it an ideal garden for growing these herbs, which are usually used fresh. These herbs can be mixed with pepper, garlic, and other spices to make a rub for fish or meat. They can also be added to stews, like the popular vegetable stew called ratatouille.

Pickling Spice

Ingredients: ginger, mustard seed, cloves, coriander seed, allspice, mace, dried chilies.

Pickling has been used in northern and eastern Europe for centuries as a way to preserve vegetables. Whole spices, rather than ground, should be used for pickling. They can be added right to the vinegar, or tied in a muslin bag and removed later. You can also try adding black or white peppercorns, or leave out the chilies if you're not a fan of their flavor.

Zhug or zhoug

Ingredients: black peppercorn, caraway seed, whole cumin, cardamom seed, fresh hot pepper, garlic, chopped coriander (cilantro) leaves

This traditional spice mixture is used as a condiment in Yemen. You can chop the fresh ingredients, then pound the spices in to make a paste. Or add some water and simmer the mixture for about ten minutes. Use it on breads or in soups. Refrigerate it in an airtight jar with a layer of oil spread over the top

Curry Powder

Ingredients: red chilies, coriander seed, cumin seed, black mustard seed, black peppercorn, fenugreek seed, curry or bay leaves, ginger, turmeric

Spice blends, or masalas, are the heart of Indian cooking. There are as many masalas as there are cooks, and Indian families often have their own traditional blends made for them by a spice grinder. The ingredients vary from region to region, north to south. This is a basic mixture, but you could also add or substitute many spices, like cinnamon, mace, nutmeg, or cloves.

Five Spice

Ingredients: fennel seeds, star anise, cinnamon stick, peppercorns, cloves
This blend is a staple in Chinese cooking, and is often used in a technique called "flavor potting." Meat is steeped in a rich sauce and cooked for long hours. The spices included here are the most commonly used in five-spice powder, and encompass five flavors—sweet, sour, bitter, pungent, and salty. Some recipes use them in equal proportions; others use more of one to heighten a specific flavor.

Garam masala

Aromatic mixture based on cumin and coriander in combination with sweet spices (cinnamon, cardamom, cloves and Indian bay-leaves). Basically Persian in origin, it is now indispensable for Northern Indian cuisine. Rather mild

Quatre épices

Somewhat antiquated, but still much used mixture of white or black pepper with several aromatic spices (nutmeg, cloves, and ginger). It may substitute pepper in nearly every dish, imparting a richer taste. From old pre-revolutionary France.

Sambaar

Indispensable for the authentic taste of South Indian cuisine. Besides the ubiquitous cumin, it contains several other spices (black mustard seeds, fenugreek seeds, chiles) and large amounts of roasted lentils or small beans. Fairly hot.

Shichimi togarashi

A Japanese spice mixture served to soups and other tasty dishes. Hot chiles and sichuan pepper are combined with sea grass, sesame seeds and orange peel. Fairly hot.

Baharat

A mixture common to flavour mutton in the countries surrounding the Persian Gulf; usually, the powder is shortly fried in butter before usage. Baharat contains, besides pungent paprika, chiles and black pepper, a variety of aromatic sweet spices (cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg and cardamom), furthermore cumin and coriander.

Berebere

Ethiopian cuisine at its best, combining elements from both Arabic and Indian cooking styles to this highly aromatic and very hot mixture: Long pepper and chiles make up for pungency, whereas cardamom, allspice and others cause a sweet and harmonic fragrance.

Bouquet garni

A bundle of fresh herbs, tied together to allow easy removal. In France, it nearly always contains parsley and thyme; furthermore, chervil is a frequent component and sometimes bay leaves or even orange peel. Variants are used in Germany and Italy..

Fines Herbes (see chives)

This classical French composition combines four fresh herbs (chives, parsley, chervil and tarragon). Mostly suited for very fine and delicate dishes.