



Third Edition

The  
**SPICE  
& HERB  
BIBLE**

IACP  
AWARD  
WINNER

**IAN HEMPHILL**  
with recipes by  
**KATE HEMPHILL**





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THIS SECTION OF THE BOOK is designed to be a quick source of information on 97 herbs and spices, selected because they are the ones most used in cooking or have a particularly interesting history and culinary applications. The details included in each entry were selected based on my sense of relevance to the consumer. I have worked in most aspects of the herb and spice business, from growing herbs in my childhood to managing a spice company in Singapore and starting my own artisan herb and spice business in the mid 1990s. Fifty years of giving lectures and classes and talking to a wide variety of consumers, including chefs and food manufacturers, have given me insight into the information people want to know.

For the past eighteen years my wife, Elizabeth, and I have traveled widely on buying trips for our business, Herbie's Spices, which is based in Sydney, Australia. We have also led regular Spice Discovery tours to India. Thanks to our work and our travels, we have been fortunate to experience many fascinating aspects of the spice trade that I feel may be of relevance to readers. I have included some of these useful (I hope) facts and anecdotes in the listings. I trust you will find them interesting.

# How to Use the Spice and Herb Listings

THE SPICES AND HERBS are listed in alphabetical order by common name; the botanical name is cited below it. Here is a guide to the various subheadings used.

## Common Name

This is the single name for the herb and/or spice that is most commonly used and recognized.

## Botanical Name

Many plants, including those from which we harvest spices and herbs, go by a variety of common names. These variations in nomenclature can be extremely confusing, especially to consumers. With a nod toward ensuring clarity, I have included the botanical (scientific) name of every plant with each entry. Although scientists may still argue about some family affiliations among plants, botanical names do provide a system of plant classification that is universally accepted.

The first attempt at classifying plants was made by the Greek philosopher Theophrastus in the fourth century BCE. Theophrastus classified plants as either herbs, shrubs or trees. At the time, the word *herb* was used merely as a reference to plant size; it was not an indication of any culinary or medicinal attributes. The next significant step was made in 1753 by Carl Linnaeus. In his groundbreaking *Species Plantarum* he noted differences in the forms of flowers. This method of classification groups plants according to one particular characteristic; however, it does not necessarily indicate their genetic commonality with other, similar plants. Linnaeus gave a two-part name to each plant, one for its genus, or generic name, and the other for its species. This practice has endured because the use of Latin makes the system universal. The full botanical name is often followed by the name (or its abbreviation) of the botanist who first described the species. So in the case of cardamom, the botanical name for green cardamom is *Elettaria cardamomum* Maton. *Elettaria* is the genus, *cardamomum* is the species and Maton is the name of the botanist who first described it.



# Ajowan

*Trachyspermum ammi* (also known as *Carum ajowan*)

## Names in Other Languages

- **Arabic:** kamme muluki, talib-el koubs
- **Chinese (C):** yan douh johng wuih heung
- **Chinese (M):** yin du zang hui xiang
- **Dutch:** ajowan
- **French:** ajowan
- **German:** Adiowan, indischer Kummel
- **Indian:** ajwain, omum, ajvini, javanee, yamani carom, lovage
- **Italian:** ajowan
- **Russian:** ajova, azhgon
- **Spanish:** ajowan
- **Turkish:** misir anason, emmus

**Family:** Apiaceae (formerly Umbelliferae)

**Other Names:** ajwain, bishop's weed, carum, white carum seeds (bleached ajowan)

**Flavor Group:** Pungent

**Parts Used:** seeds (as a spice)

## Background

Ajowan is native to the Indian subcontinent. It is grown in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran and Pakistan. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, ajowan was the world's main source of thymol, a volatile oil used in the manufacture of mouthwash, toothpaste, cough syrup, lozenges and some herbal medicines (it is also found in the herb thyme). Until 1914 almost all exports of ajowan seeds were to Germany, for extraction of thymol for medicinal use. Ajowan seeds contain 2.5–5% volatile oil, over 35% of which is thymol.



## Culinary Information

### Combines with

- chile
- coriander seed
- cumin
- fenugreek seed
- ginger
- mustard
- nutmeg
- paprika
- most herbs

### Traditional Uses

- breads
- Moroccan tagines
- pakoras, parathas and samosas
- savory biscuits
- vegetable and fish curries
- vegetable dishes
- whole-grain mustard

### Spice Blends

- berbere
- curry powders

## The Plant

Ajowan is a close relative of parsley and the plants look similar; however, ajowan leaves are not used in cooking. The seeds are small, tear-shaped and light brown. Resembling celery seeds, they form in umbrella-shaped clusters. Ajowan seeds taste like thyme because of their high levels of the volatile oil thymol—an unusually herby flavor for a seed spice. It is well complemented by slightly sharp, peppery notes and a lingering warm aftertaste. Bleached ajowan seeds, although rarely seen, are milder in flavor and are referred to as white carum seeds.

## Processing

Ajowan seeds are ready to harvest in midsummer, when the flower heads turn brown. The plants are uprooted and dried on mats in the sun, then the flowers are rubbed by hand to separate the seeds. The volatile oil thymol is extracted by steam distillation.

## Buying and Storage

Ajowan seeds should be uniform in color and free from extraneous pieces of stem material. Always buy whole seeds; if grinding is required, do this yourself using a mortar and pestle or a clean pepper mill. Recently harvested seeds will have a distinct herbal aroma and a somewhat sharp, peppery taste. Should these attributes be missing, the seeds are too old to use in cooking. Store in an airtight container away



## Romesco Sauce

This traditional Catalan sauce hails from Tarragona, in northern Spain. It is perfect served with roasted monkfish or a barbecued leg of lamb, or simply used as a dip with bread or crudités. The smokiness originally came from using ñora paprikas, but as they are increasingly hard to come by, sweet smoked paprika is a wonderful substitution.

**Makes about  
1 cup (250 mL)**

**Preparation time:**  
15 minutes

**Cooking time:**  
5 minutes

### Tips

You can either roast your own red peppers or use the jarred variety.

*To roast peppers:* Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C). Place peppers on a baking sheet and roast until skin is blackened, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a bag, seal and set aside until cool. Once cool, the skin will easily peel off. Using a knife, scrape out the seeds and discard.

### • Food processor

4	slices sourdough bread, roughly chopped	4
14 oz	ripe tomatoes, seeded and chopped (about 6)	400 g
3	roasted red peppers (see Tips, left)	3
1 tbsp	sweet smoked paprika	15 mL
2 tbsp	freshly squeezed lemon juice	30 mL
1 tsp	sherry vinegar	5 mL
¼	medium red onion, chopped	¼
2	cloves garlic, roughly chopped	2
2 tbsp	sliced almonds	30 mL
¼ cup	extra virgin olive oil	60 mL
	Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper	

1. In food processor fitted with the metal blade, combine bread, tomatoes, roasted peppers, paprika, lemon juice, vinegar, onion, garlic, and almonds. Process until mixture resembles a rough paste. With motor running, add oil through the feed tube. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Sauce will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

# Vanilla

*Vanilla planifolia*

## Names in Other Languages

- Arabic: wanila, fanilya
- Chinese (C): wahn nei la
- Chinese (M): xiang jia lan
- Czech: vanilka
- Danish: vanilje
- Dutch: vanille
- French: vanille
- German: Vanille
- Greek: vanillia
- Hungarian: vanília
- Indian: vanilla, vanikkodo
- Indonesian: paneli
- Italian: vaniglia
- Japanese: banira
- Malay: waneela
- Norwegian: vanilje
- Portuguese: baunilha
- Russian: vanil'
- Spanish: vainilla
- Swedish: vanilj
- Thai: waneela
- Turkish: vanilya

**Family:** Orchidaceae

**Varieties:** vanilla (*V. planifolia*, also known as *V. fragrans*), West Indian vanilla (*V. pompona*), Tahitian vanilla (*V. tahitensis*), salep (*Orchis latifolia*, *O. mascula*, *O. maculata*, *O. anatolica*)

**Other Names:** vanilla bean, vanilla pod, vanilla extract, vanilla essence, vanilla bean paste

**Flavor Group:** Sweet

**Parts Used:** pods (as a spice)

## Background

Vanilla is indigenous to the southeast of Mexico and parts of Central America, where it grows in well-drained soils that are high in humus from the surrounding tropical vegetation. Although it is not known when the Aztecs started using vanilla, its production had reached a considerable degree of sophistication by the time the Spanish were introduced to the spice in 1520. A drink of chocolate and vanilla sweetened with honey was given to Cortés by the Aztec emperor Montezuma. So impressed were the Spanish by this discovery that they imported vanilla beans and established factories in Spain to manufacture chocolate flavored with vanilla. Quite apart from its flavor, vanilla apparently earned a reputation as a nerve stimulant and an aphrodisiac. It was also used to scent tobacco.

Although plants were taken to England as early as 1733 and were reintroduced at the beginning of the 19th century, all serious attempts to get them to produce pods outside their natural habitat failed. In the middle of the 19th century, botanists discovered that the plants were barren because they lacked natural pollinators. In an amazing twist of fate, a 12-year-old slave by the name of Edmund Albius on the island of Réunion found he could hand-pollinate vanilla flowers. Thereafter a satisfactory method of hand-pollination was devised and spread around the world. By the early 20th century vanilla was being cultivated in Réunion, Tahiti and parts of Africa and Madagascar.

## Culinary Information

### Combines with

- allspice
- angelica (crystallized)
- cardamom
- cinnamon and cassia
- cloves
- ginger
- lavender
- lemon myrtle
- lemon verbena
- licorice
- mint
- nutmeg
- pandan leaf
- poppy seed
- rose petals
- sesame seed
- wattleseed

### Traditional Uses

- ice cream
- dessert creams and sauces
- cakes
- cookies
- sweets
- liqueurs
- vanilla sugar

### Spice Blends

- sugar and spice blends



Sadly, the invention of artificial vanilla—made from the waste sulfite liquor of paper mills combined with coal-tar extracts or eugenol, the oil from cloves—nearly ruined the natural vanilla industry. Imitation vanilla was about one-tenth the price of real vanilla, and although inferior in flavor profile, it soon accounted for the lion's share of vanilla flavoring used in the manufacture of ice cream, confectionery and beverages. By the end of the 20th century, however, consumer demand for natural flavors and an appreciation of the superior flavor nuances in real vanilla had created some resurgence in the Mexican industry, as well as opportunities for new producers such as India, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia.

## The Plant

Vanilla is a member of the orchid genus, which forms part of the largest family of flowering plants in the world, encompassing some 20,000 species. There are about 100 varieties of vanilla. It is one of the only genera in Orchidaceae that have any culinary significance, the other being the obscure and hard-to-find salep (*Orchis latifolia*,



# The Principles of Making Spice Blends

*When I make a spice blend, I seek to create a distinctive taste. Sometimes the blend bears little resemblance to any of the individual spices used. In others a few characteristic flavors may dominate, for example, in mixed spice (North American apple pie or pumpkin pie spice), where cinnamon and cloves are often the first detectable aromas.*

OFTEN ONE OF THE GREATEST PLEASURES in using spices is combining them with each other to create completely different tastes. Spice blends, also called seasonings, mixes, masalas or rubs, are a convenient and effective way to add flavor when cooking. Anyone can make their own blends with only a basic understanding of how to combine a variety of spices. Like any artist, the spice blender will bring a range of components together to create a homogeneous result that is uniquely personal.

Spice blending is indeed an art as much as a science. Every professional spice blender will have his or her own approach to making a blend. The requirements may vary considerably, depending on the end user. A multinational food company that wants a blend to use in fast-food outlets will require a flavor profile that doesn't offend anyone. It will also be concerned about cost and whether ingredients of consistent quality are readily available. In the mid 20th century the majority of these blends were high in salt, sugar and monosodium glutamate (MSG). By the 1990s they still tended to be high in salt (after all, it is cheap and heavy, the dry food-maker's answer to water); wheat flour, used as filler; and free-flow agents, required to prevent clumping. (*Clumping* is the term used in the spice trade to describe the formation of lumps. It occurs when spice blends contain hygroscopic, or water-attracting, ingredients and are stored for long periods in less than ideal conditions.) In the 2000s the better spice blends reduced their dependence on ingredients such as salt, MSG and wheat and began including a higher proportion of completely natural herbs and spices.

Once you become familiar with the panoply of herbs and spices, it is apparent that most of those we use have distinctive and often strikingly different characteristics. Some are strong and—if sampled in isolation—could even be described as unpleasant. Others (such as two of my favorites, cinnamon and paprika) are a delight to experience even on their own.

Although the following guidelines will help you to understand the basic principles of making spice blends, there are really no hard-and-fast rules. Use your own creativity and instincts to create a range of unique tastes that you will enjoy.

# The Art of Blending Spices

The art of making a successful spice blend involves bringing together a range of different tastes and textures to create an ideal balance. It's a bit like balancing sweet, salty, sour and bitter taste elements when preparing a meal. When combining spices, we balance their different attributes. For this purpose I group spices into five basic categories: sweet, pungent, tangy, hot and amalgamating.

## Balancing Sweet, Pungent, Tangy and Hot in a Typical Blend

The following guide (page 683) is to help you gain an instinct for the relative strengths of key spices. The suggested quantities of the most commonly used sweet, pungent, tangy and hot spices, combined with an appropriate amalgamating spice, will produce a spice blend that is uniquely yours. The quantities called for (in teaspoons/mL) approximate the proportion of the various types of spices by volume found in a typical blend. Remember, this is an approximate guide only. For instance, within the pungent group, ground star anise is stronger than ground caraway seed, so if you were using it, you would likely want to reduce the quantity.

## Be Careful When Adding Other Ingredients

The only time you need to exercise caution when making spice blends is when you are incorporating ingredients other than herbs and spices. In some instances adverse flavor reactions may occur over time. For example, when black pepper is used in mixes that contain fats such as dehydrated coconut cream, after a few months the combination will produce off flavors with unpleasant soapy notes. This kind of reaction is the exception rather than the rule and does not affect normal home-cooking situations using natural herbs and spices.





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