



INCLUDES
INFORMATION
ON 15 ESSENTIAL
SPICES & HERBS
+ 60 RECIPES

HOW TO ADD FLAVOR

AN INTRODUCTION
TO
SPICES
& HERBS

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Let's Begin

IT'S AN UNDISPUTED FACT that everyone must eat to stay alive. Even the most boring food can keep you alive — but who wants to live on bland food, when it's so easy to make it tasty and interesting?

People often say they can't cook with spices even when they have been proficient in the kitchen for many years. It seems there is uncertainty surrounding the act of adding spice to food, so we're here to reassure you just how wonderful and easy it is to add great flavors to your everyday cooking.

Whenever I cook something, even the simplest barbecue, I'm told, "Wow, you are such a great cook."

The reason people say this is because the food tastes amazing simply due to the use of herbs and spices to deliver wonderful flavors. You can get the same results by browsing the information we are sharing with you, including the easy ways to add readily available ingredients to basic proteins and vegetables and the section with 60 recipes using the spices and herbs you just learned how to use. Try our tips and recipes out yourself, and then enjoy sharing your spice experiences with family and friends and bask in the compliments!

THE SPICE TRADE

Spices, being dried, could be easily transported over long distances, as was done for centuries along various trade routes and silk roads by camel trains, and subsequently by sea. Thus, a lucrative spice trade developed, incentivizing explorers to take huge risks in the hope of finding a source of supply that could be monopolized and traded at a huge profit.

Using the Book

We've organized this book in three basic sections and we encourage you to read through them before starting to cook.

First, there are profiles of what we have found are the fifteen most popular spices and herbs used in cooking today. We've given you an overview of each one, including helpful information on the aromas and flavors and what foods pair best with them.

Next is the Spice and Herb Recipe Tutorial, which contains four basic recipes--Skillet Chicken Breast with Pan Sauce, Classic Pot Roast, Salmon Parcels, or Crispy Fried Tofu. Not only are these designed to teach you how to cook simple proteins, but when you choose one of the four Flavor Change-Ups that go with each recipe, you will begin to learn how using different spices and herbs can change the flavor profile and turn a perfectly nice dish into something spectacular. Finally, you can take your new-found skills to the next level by trying our 60 exciting, easy-to-make recipes, using all the spices and herbs you just learned about.

Spices and Herbs Defined

We all talk about herbs and spices constantly, but rarely think of what the difference between the two categories is or how this influences the way we use them. So, let's go over some basics.

An herb is what we define as the leafy part of a plant used in cooking, like basil, mint and rosemary.

A spice may come from any other part of the plant, such as the bark, berries, roots, fruits or seeds. Examples include cinnamon, peppercorns, turmeric, chiles and cumin.

We can use herbs in fresh or dried form, depending on the recipe and, to some degree, what is available at the time. Spices are mostly used in dried form, as it is the drying process that creates their distinct flavors.

Buying and Storage

All the herbs and spices in this book are readily available in stores; however, there are some important things to remember when shopping for, storing and preparing them.

For fresh herbs, look for unwilted leaves that don't have any noticeable brown or black spots on them, which is a sign of being past their best. When you get your herbs home, sit the bunch in a glass with the bottom of their stems in clean water, shroud with a light plastic bag and store in the refrigerator.

KOSHER AND HALAL

You will notice that many herbs and spices and some spice blends will have on the label that they are kosher or halal, or both. This is because, under the dietary guidelines that come from their respective religious texts, there are rules with respect to how some foods are prepared, most notably regarding meat. Other foods are restricted from the diet. This means that an herb, a spice or a spice blend labeled this way won't contain an ingredient that is not allowed.

FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES ...

The first fragmented records of the use of spices date as far back as 2600 BCE. Egyptians at that time knew about and appreciated the medicinal properties of onions and garlic, so these foods were fed to the 100,000 laborers who worked on the construction of the Great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt.

In another example, a long list of aromatic plants including thyme, sesame, cardamom, turmeric, saffron, poppy, garlic, cumin, anise and coriander was discovered in a scroll of cuneiform script, one of the oldest forms of known writing, from the great library in Nineveh (in modern-day Iraq), established by King Ashurbanipal of Assyria (668–627 BCE).

STORAGE TIP

Be careful when storing spices in the fridge or freezer. When you take the package out, condensation will form, introducing moisture. If you must store them that way, make sure all signs of condensation have disappeared before you open the package.

When picking the leaves from the stems, always strip them off in an upward motion. A downward motion will take some of the firmer stem along with the leaf, which isn't so desirable in your food.

For dried herbs and spices, it is always best to buy them packed in resealable, airtight pouches or to place them in jars. Store at home away from heat, light and humidity, as these factors will shorten the shelf life. Properly processed dried herbs and spices will never go bad; they will just lose their pungency over time. When using these, never put a wet spoon in the container or and hold the container over a steaming saucepan, as this introduces moisture, which will shorten the time the herb or spice is at its best. On average, whole spices will keep their flavor for three or more years, and dried herbs and powdered spices will stay tasty for around eighteen months.

Using Whole or Ground

Sometimes recipes will use whole spices and sometimes ground. This is because the way they deliver the taste and appearance in a recipe will be different.

For example, whole spices such as cinnamon and cumin will be used to flavor rice while it is cooking, but don't change its color the way cinnamon powder or ground cumin would.

Ground spices and rubbed herbs are needed when one wants a rub to use on meats before cooking. These will also release their flavors quickly, as grinding releases the oils that give them their personality. In a Moroccan tagine, ground spices help to form the delicious gravy.

Growing your Own

Herb plants, available from nurseries and plant stores, are not difficult to grow if you have space in the garden and a place to keep them in pots or a window box. Talk to the folks at the nursery who can provide a wealth of information to start you on your herb growing journey.

Herbs are classified as either annual or perennial. Annuals like cilantro only grow for one year (some maybe two), while perennials like rosemary will grow for many years.

The few basic requirements are well-drained soil or potting mix, sunshine and fresh air. This means herbs will not thrive indoors unless you have a window box where they can be caressed by the wonders of a natural environment.

Your annuals will flower every year. After flowering, the herb goes to seed and its root system dies. To prolong growth, get more leaves sprouting and encourage the herb to live for longer, nip off flower buds as soon as they appear to interrupt the life cycle.

"Enjoy
sharing
with family
and friends."

HEALTHY EATING

All spices are high in micronutrients, antioxidants and phytochemicals making them a beneficial addition to your diet. The majority are low in fat and sodium and contain vitamins associated with good health. Many references to the potential health benefits of an herb or a spice might commence with statements like, "May help prevent inflammation ..." However, one needs to be aware that all the compounds in herbs and spices will benefit most individuals, while not necessarily alleviating a particular disease. Most importantly, using herbs and spices in one's meals reduces the need for foods that are high in artificial flavor enhancers, fats, sugars and salt. Natural, wholesome food that tastes great is one's best insurance against illness and disease.



Allspice

Allspice is actually a berry harvested from a tropical evergreen tree native to Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. Columbus's journal of 1492 mentions that the people of Cuba were shown black peppercorns and led to them communicating that there was an abundance of these in the area. So, word got back to Spain about this 'pepper' and for many years it was called Jamaica pepper.

Even King Philip IV of Spain, thinking that pepper grew wild in Jamaica, sent minions to get some to boost the royal coffers with 'la pimenta de Jamaica'. Imagine the disappointment when they returned with, what was at that time, almost worthless allspice! Confusion reigned for some time, until the term allspice was universally adopted as its common name, because the flavor was reminiscent of a mixture of cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg.

drying process takes the green unripe berries from the tree and turns them into a much loved and useful ingredient. Just like cloves, pepper and vanilla, drying this spice in the sun activates naturally occurring enzymes in the berries that turns them dark brown and creates eugenol, a volatile oil that gives allspice its characteristic fragrance, much like mild cloves and, surprisingly, fresh basil leaves!

Flavor

The same volatile oil that gives allspice its aroma also helps deliver, along with other compounds, a distinct clove-like flavor that has a touch of sun-dried fruitiness. Although it's not so surprising to find eugenol can be found in cloves, it's also in cinnamon, bay leaves and star anise.

PLANTATION WALKS

Allspice plantations in Jamaica are called 'walks' as the trees grow in rows along fence lines. The walks came into being when birds, who ate the green berries, perched on fence lines, and seeds were expelled in their droppings. Presto! Trees grew along these fence lines.

Aroma

As is so often the case with spices, the magic that creates their scent (and flavors) comes to the fore as part of a completely natural

Pairings

Allspice is an excellent substitute for cloves but it's milder and fruitier, and lacks that strong medicinal reminder of the dentist! Ground allspice is a key ingredient in Jamaican jerk seasoning, is used in curry powders, tagines, Chinese dishes and tomato and barbecue sauces. The whole berries are used in pickling spices. You don't need to use much. We use it in recipes to add a depth of flavor and, like basil, it goes well in Italian tomato-based recipes. Ground allspice can be found in supermarkets and should be dark brown; not pale, grainy or dusty. Store as you would all your ground spices in airtight packaging.



Basil

Basil is one of the most popular herbs and there are many varieties, though sweet basil is the one that is readily available at most grocery stores. Sweet basil plants could be referred to as small shrubs with soft, deep green oval and somewhat crinkly leaves attached to tough, grooved and square stems. Fresh basil is generally sold in bunches, providing plenty of delicious leaves for most recipes. Avoid buying fresh basil that is wilted or has black marks on the leaves as it is not as fresh as it should be. As a seasonal sun-loving plant, fresh basil is most abundant and economical in stores during the summer.

Aroma

Basil was the first herb I could identify by aroma in my mother's herb garden. For me, basil's refreshing clove-anise-like aroma conjures up memories of summer, hardly surprising when one considers how this herb thrives in heat and expires at the first chill of winter.

Flavor

Fresh basil's flavor is bright, clean and clove-like with a warm depth of flavor that complements every food it is added to. Although the fresh leaves are quite pungent, the actual flavor is never overpowering, a phenomenon that seems to be unique to this herb. This means that it is almost impossible to use too much fresh basil in a salad, or in pesto.

When fresh basil is out of season, dried may be used as a substitute in some recipes.

The moisture is greatly reduced in dried basil, and the fresh aroma is lost, so the flavor becomes concentrated and stronger.

Pairings

Basil's unique flavor profile pairs exceptionally well with tomatoes and tomato-based dishes, and gardeners will tell you basil and tomatoes are companion plants. Fresh basil is used in Italian and other southern European cuisines, possibly because it is abundant in these warmer climates. Basil complements almost every food you can imagine, from Bolognese sauces, to eggplant, zucchini, squash, lentils and new potatoes. Basil blended into cream cheese for a sandwich filling is a welcome variation. The versatility does not stop there though, as basil's clean, fresh notes enhance chicken, pork, fish and shellfish.

Dried basil is preferred and works best in all cooked tomato dishes, including Bolognese and pasta sauces, baked, barbecued, roasted or fried chicken. Should you still wish to add some fresh basil to these, be sure to add it in the last 15 minutes of cooking to retain its fresh flavor notes.

Storage

Due to its soft leaves, storage of fresh basil is a bit different to the usual way of storing fresh herbs as I've described in the introduction. A bunch will keep in the refrigerator for a week or more. Wrap paper towels around the base of the stems, wet them and seal the whole bunch in a plastic bag.



Chile

Also known as red pepper and cayenne pepper, chile plants bear fruits of varying sizes and colors, the one constant being different levels of heat. This heat, which comes from a crystalline substance called capsaicin, means that the wonderful flavor contribution from chiles is often overlooked. Capsaicin is in the greatest concentration in the seeds and the seed-bearing placenta in the chile, and to a lesser degree in the skin. In this book, we focus on the most readily available and easiest to use chiles, including fresh green, yellow and red pods, along with dried chili flakes, ground chile, red pepper and cayenne pepper. There are too many varieties to mention here, so if you become a chile addict your best reference book will be *The Chile Pepper Bible* by Judith Finlayson.

The heat levels in chiles are measured by Scoville units that may vary from 20,000 to over one million!

Be aware that chili powder sold in stores is generally a spice blend that contains cumin, paprika, garlic and other ingredients as well as ground chile. Don't buy it, as we will show you how to mix the right spices together when these flavors are required in a recipe.

Aroma

Fresh chiles have a clean, light, bell pepper-style aroma that does not really indicate how hot the chile is. With dried chiles, you get a caramelisation of the sugars in the pods that has developed on ripening. During drying, these sugars and the volatiles create a deeper more robust aroma, which vary depending on

the chile variety. Ground ancho chile will have a different aroma to Kashmiri chile powder.

Flavor

The flavor of fresh chiles is like bell peppers and sweet paprika. Dried chiles have deep robust flavor notes and they are almost as much about flavor as heat. Think of the difference between a fresh tomato and a sun-dried tomato and you get the idea.

Use fresh chiles in dishes that are not cooked (salads) or only cooked for a short time (stir-fry, omelettes and Asian soups). Dried chiles are used in dishes that are cooked for a longer time (curries, tagines, casseroles) and with foods that have stronger flavors (pizza, pasta sauces, Mexican sauces). Either way, it all depends on your taste preferences.

Pairings

The fruity flavors and characteristic spicy heat of chiles has made them one of the most traded and popular of all spices. Cuisines that feature a lot of chiles are Mexican, Asian, curries from all cultures, especially Indian, Moroccan and Middle Eastern. When travelling or eating out, I carry a small vial of my homemade chile mix to sprinkle on everything!

Storage

Store fresh chiles in a fruit bowl for a few days until needed, or for longer in the refrigerator where they will keep for two to three weeks.

The Spice & Herb Tutorial

Now that you've been introduced to our essential kit that outlines what you need to start experimenting with herbs and spices, it's time to start cooking! Here are some basic recipes, with simple variations, called Flavor Change-Ups, to give you an appreciation of the transformative power that herbs and spices have to shift a dish's flavor profile with ease.

To get started:

- *Choose the basic recipe you'd like to try:* Skillet Chicken Breast with Pan Sauce (page xxx), Classic Pot Roast (page xxx), Salmon Parcels (page xxx), or Crispy Fried Tofu (page xxx).
- *Choose a Flavor Change-Up:* Each recipe offers four different ways to change the flavor profile of the recipe, simply by changing the dominant herb or spice.

Try the Skillet Chicken Breast with a sweet paprika Flavor Change-Up. Then try it with fresh basil. Or bake Salmon Parcels with sweet allspice and then again with fiery chile. Once you get used to how each ingredient changes the flavor of a recipe, you can start experimenting with other spices and herbs.

As you gain knowledge and confidence in the kitchen, go even further and try the 60 easy-to-make dishes in the recipe section starting on page xxx.

"It's time to
start cooking!"



Skillet Chicken Breast with Pan Sauce

This beginner-friendly recipe transforms simple chicken breasts into a flavorful meal, complete with a sauce made in the same pan. Perfect for weeknights, this dish is versatile and pairs well with buttered boiled potatoes and green beans or any of the alternative options in the variations below.

Serves 2

Large skillet

TIP

For perfectly cooked chicken, use a meat thermometer. Insert it into the thickest part of the chicken and ensure it reads 165°F (74°C) before serving.

2 boneless, skinless
chicken breasts 10 to 14 oz
(280 to 400 g)

½ tsp salt

¼ tsp pepper

1 tbsp olive oil

1 tbsp butter

½ cup (125 mL) chicken broth

Heat the olive oil and butter in a large skillet over medium heat until the butter melts and begins to foam.

Sprinkle salt and pepper on chicken breasts.

Add chicken to skillet and cook for about 3 minutes per side until golden brown. Remove to a plate.

Pour the chicken broth into the skillet, stirring to combine with the browned bits on the pan.

Turn the heat to medium-low, return the chicken to the skillet, and cook for 3 to 4 minutes per side, or until fully cooked (internal temperature of 165°F/74°C see Sidebar). Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Serve with your choice of cooked vegetables and spoon the pan sauce over the chicken.



FLAVOR CHANGE-UPS

PAPRIKA

Sweet paprika adds warm, earthy flavors to the chicken, complemented by a crispy coating.

Alternative serving suggestion: Mashed potatoes and wilted spinach.

- Combine 1 tbsp sweet paprika with 2 tbsp all-purpose flour, ¼ tsp salt, and a pinch of pepper in a shallow bowl.
- Replace Step 2 by coating the chicken breasts in the paprika mixture before cooking.

OREGANO

Dried oregano and fresh lemon juice lend a herbaceous and tangy touch.

Alternative serving suggestion: Oven fries and a dressed romaine lettuce salad.

- Sprinkle 1 tsp dried oregano and ¼ tsp salt over each side of the chicken replacing Step 2.
- Add 2 tbsp lemon juice to the chicken broth before Step 3.

GINGER

A combination of fresh ginger, honey, and soy sauce brings a classic Chinese flavor profile to the dish.

Alternative serving suggestion: Steamed jasmine rice and broccoli.

- Add 1 tbsp freshly minced ginger to the skillet at Step 1 along with the butter and oil.
- Stir in 1 tbsp honey and 2 tbsp soy sauce with the chicken broth at Step 2.

BASIL

Fresh basil and sweet cherry tomatoes add a burst of Italian-inspired flavors.

Alternative serving suggestion: Pasta shells tossed with olive oil and arugula.

- Add 10 halved cherry tomatoes to the skillet with the broth at Step 3.
- Add 20 torn basil leaves when returning the chicken to the skillet in Step 5.

Jerk-Style Chicken Thighs

It's no surprise that Jamaican native allspice is the hero in jerk marinade. Combined with herbaceous thyme and fiery chile, this is a mouthwatering marinade with delicious results. Enjoy with Black Bean Salsa (see page xxx) as a burger filling or shredded in a grain bowl.

Makes 4 servings

Preheat oven to 340°F (170°C)

Food processor

- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 large clove garlic, crushed (about 1 tsp)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1½ tsp ground allspice
- 1 Scotch bonnet chile, stem removed
- 1 tbsp packed brown sugar
- 2 tbsp neutral oil (such as canola or vegetable)
- 1 lb (500g) boneless skinless chicken thighs (about 4 medium thighs)

In a food processor, combine onion, garlic, salt, thyme, allspice, chile, sugar, and oil. Process until smooth.

Place chicken thighs in a medium bowl. Add marinade and toss until evenly coated. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Transfer chicken to prepared baking sheet, smooth side up.

Bake in preheated oven for 1 hour or until juices run clear when chicken is pierced. Do not turn during cooking.

Let stand for 5 minutes before serving.

TIPS

For bone-in, skin-on thighs (about 1½ lbs), increase cooking time by 15 minutes.

Marinate chicken for up to 2 days for more flavor.

Leftover chicken can be shredded, cooled, and frozen in an airtight container for up to 3 months.



Simple Swedish Meatballs

Swedish meatballs are a beloved comfort food classic, known for their warm spices and creamy sauce. This recipe pairs a mix of pork and beef with allspice and a touch of Dijon mustard for depth of flavor. Serve over egg noodles or with mashed potatoes for a comforting meal.

Makes about 20 meatballs
(4 servings)

MEATBALLS

5 oz (150 g) ground pork
5 oz (150 g) ground beef
½ tsp garlic powder
½ tsp salt
Pinch freshly ground black pepper
⅓ tsp ground allspice
Pinch dried oregano

½ large egg, beaten
¼ cup (25 g) dry breadcrumbs

In a large bowl, combine pork, beef, garlic powder, salt, pepper, ⅓ tsp allspice, oregano, egg, and breadcrumbs. Mix thoroughly. Roll the mixture into golf ball-sized meatballs (about 1½ inches/4 cm in diameter).

Heat a deep skillet over medium heat. Add the meatballs and brown them for 3 minutes on each side. No oil is necessary, as the fat will render during cooking. Remove the meatballs from the skillet and set aside.

To the same skillet, over low heat, add the butter and flour. Stir constantly for 1 minute to cook the flour.

Gradually whisk in the chicken stock to form a smooth sauce, keeping on low heat. Add Dijon mustard, ¼ tsp allspice, and sour cream. Stir well to combine.

Return the meatballs to the skillet. Simmer for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the meatballs are cooked through and the sauce has thickened.

Season the sauce to taste with additional salt and pepper before serving.

TIP

Once rolled, the meatballs can be stored in the refrigerator a day before cooking, or frozen for up to 3 months.

SAUCE

1 tbsp unsalted butter
2 tbsp (30 mL) all-purpose flour
1½ cups (375 mL) chicken stock
¼ tsp Dijon mustard
¼ tsp ground allspice
½ cup (125 mL) sour cream

Allspice Apple Teatime Cake

This lightly spiced apple cake is perfect for a morning or afternoon treat. The warm flavor of allspice pairs beautifully with the natural sweetness of green apples much the way cinnamon would, with a little more depth.

Makes one 9-inch (23 cm) cake

Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C)

9-inch (23 cm) cake pan, greased

Electric stand mixer or portable mixer

We don't cover vanilla in this book, but it's a widely used and revered spice. Vanilla comes from the bean of a tropical orchid, which is dried and cured before use. Make sure you always buy vanilla extract not essence, as essence may simply be artificial.

CAKE

½ cup (125 mL) superfine (caster) sugar (see Tips)
¼ cup (60 mL) butter
1 egg
1¼ cups (300 mL) all-purpose flour
½ tsp ground allspice
1 tsp baking powder

6 tbsp (90 mL) milk
1 large cooking apple, peeled, cored, and cut into ½-inch (1 cm) dice

TOPPING

1 tbsp superfine (caster) sugar
½ tsp ground allspice
1 tbsp butter, melted

In a mixing bowl, beat the sugar and butter at high speed until light and fluffy. Add the egg and mix to combine.

Gradually mix in the flour, allspice, and baking powder.

Add the milk, 1 to 2 tbsp at a time, mixing until the batter reaches dropping consistency (see Tips).

Pour the batter into the prepared cake pan. Top evenly with the diced apple, pressing the fruit gently into the batter.

Bake in the preheated oven for 20 to 25 minutes, until browned on top and a skewer inserted into the center comes out clean.

Remove from the oven and let cool in the pan for about 5 minutes. Turn the cake out onto a wire rack and cool for another 5 minutes.

For topping, in a small bowl, mix the sugar and allspice. Brush the top of the cake with the melted butter, then sprinkle evenly with the cinnamon-sugar mixture.

Serve warm or cool. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

TIPS

If unavailable, process regular granulated sugar in a food processor until fine.

For the best results, use cooking apples such as Braeburn, Honeycrisp, or Jonagold.

Dropping Consistency: Batter should fall easily from a spoon into the bowl within seconds.

Allspice Roasted Sweet Potato

This warm, spiced dish highlights the natural sweetness of sweet potatoes with a tangy touch of lime and the depth of allspice. Perfect as a side for grilled meats and fresh salads.

Makes 4 servings as a side

Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C)

Baking sheet, lined with parchment paper

1⅓ lb (600 g) sweet potatoes (2 small), skin on, halved lengthwise

1 tbsp olive oil

1 tbsp lime juice

1 tsp brown sugar

½ tsp ground allspice

Pinch salt

In a small bowl, mix olive oil, lime juice, brown sugar, allspice, and salt until smooth.

Place sweet potatoes cut-side up on the prepared baking sheet. Using a sharp knife, score (see Tip) the cut side of each sweet potato diagonally ½ inch (1 cm) apart.

Divide the oil mixture evenly over the cut sides of the sweet potatoes, ensuring full coverage.

Roast in preheated oven for 45 minutes or until the sweet potatoes are soft, and the tops are browned.

Serve warm as a side dish.

TIP

To score means to make a shallow incision in the meat or vegetable, allowing your flavorings to penetrate more while cooking.

VARIATION

Cut sweet potato into 1-inch (2.5 cm) cubes and reduce cooking time to 25 minutes, then use in salads or grain bowls.

Lemon, Crab and Basil Linguine

This elegant, restaurant-quality dish is surprisingly simple to make at home. The secret lies in using the freshest, highest-quality ingredients you can find. Basil is not the hero here, but an important element in bringing the flavors together. Serve with Watermelon & Mint Salad (page xxx) for the ultimate summer lunch.

Makes 2 servings

- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 3.5 oz (100 g) cooked white crab meat (see Tips)
- 2 tsp crushed garlic
- 2 tsp finely grated lemon zest
- 1 long red chile, deseeded and very finely diced
- 15 basil leaves, torn
- ½ tsp salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 7 oz (200 g) dried linguine

Put a large pot of salted water on the stove and bring to a boil.

Meanwhile, in a small skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute, or until fragrant. Stir in the crab meat, lemon zest, chili, basil, salt, and pepper. Cook for 1 more minute, stirring well. Turn off the heat and set aside.

Add linguine to the boiling water and cook according to the package instructions. When nearly done, reserve ¼ cup (60 mL) of the pasta water and add it to the skillet with the crab mixture.

Drain the cooked pasta and return it to the pot. Add the crab mixture and toss well with tongs to coat the pasta evenly. Season to taste with additional salt and pepper if needed. Serve immediately.

TIPS

Use fresh crab meat for the best flavor, or canned crab if fresh isn't available. If canned, ensure it's drained well before using.

If you prefer a spicier kick, leave the seeds in the chile.



The Only Pesto Recipe You Will EVER Need

This fresh flavorful pesto is made with fragrant basil, toasted pine nuts, and rich Parmesan. Serve it through hot pasta, add to oil for a salad dressing or whisk into eggs before scrambling. Beware of store-bought pesto that often contains preservatives and cheaper ingredients such as peanuts and vegetable oil instead of pine nuts and olive oil. Pesto was traditionally roughly mixed in a mortar and pestle, but a food processor is a very efficient and easy way to do it now. Because of the fine blending, you don't need to remove the leaves from the stem as they contain just as much flavor!

Makes 4-6 servings

Food processor

What is a mortar and pestle? A pestle is a heavy stone tool (like half a rolling pin) and a mortar is a heavy stone bowl. In ancient times, this was the only method for milling or grinding. They are still used commonly when wanting a course powder (like spices) or rough paste (like pesto).

- 2 cups (500 mL) tightly packed fresh basil leaves
- ½ cup (125 mL) pine nuts, lightly toasted (see Tips)
- ½ cup (125 mL) coarsely chopped Parmesan cheese
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ tsp finely grated lemon zest
- ½ tsp fine sea salt
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- ⅓ cup (75 mL) extra virgin olive oil

In a food processor fitted with the metal blade, add basil, pine nuts, Parmesan, garlic, lemon zest, salt, and pepper.

With the motor running, add oil through the feed tube and process until the pesto mixture is puréed but retains some texture.

Serve immediately or store as below (see Tips).

TIPS

To toast pine nuts, cook them in a dry skillet over medium heat, shaking the pan lightly for about 2 minutes, until lightly golden. Remove from heat as soon as they start to color.

Pesto will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks, as long as the top is covered with ⅛ inch (2 mm) olive oil to prevent oxidation. Pesto can also be frozen to keep fresh—ice cube trays are great for freezing single portions for pasta. Simply drain pasta, reserving a little cooking liquid, then stir through the pesto and it will melt in moments.

For a runnier pesto, simply add ¼ cup (60 mL) water with the oil. This is good for using as a salad dressing.

VARIATION

Replace one cup of basil with baby spinach for a nutrition-packed pesto.

Roast Tomato & Basil Soup

Basil and tomato are a classic culinary partnership. As you've read, basil leaves and allspice berries share a common compound, eugenol, making allspice a natural addition to this recipe. This soup is delicious served with warm, crusty garlic bread.

Makes 4 servings

Preheat the oven to 220°F (100°C)

Rectangular baking tray, lined with parchment

Stick blender

- 2 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 lbs (1 kg) ripe tomatoes, halved
- 2 large cloves garlic, peeled
- ½ tsp ground allspice
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 3 cups (750 mL) vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 tbsp tomato puree
- 10 leaves fresh basil
- Additional extra virgin olive oil, to serve

Place the tomatoes and garlic on the tray. Sprinkle with allspice, dried basil and sea salt, then drizzle with the olive oil. Roast in preheated oven for 2 hours until very soft.

Bring the stock to a simmer on the stove, and once the tomatoes are roasted, add them with roasted garlic to the stock. Stir in the tomato paste and basil. Bring the soup to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes.

Remove the soup from the heat. Allow the soup to cool slightly, then puree in a blender or directly in the pan using a stick blender.

Serve with additional oil and a fresh basil leaf if desired.

TIP

This soup can be served hot or chilled, but it is best enjoyed at room temperature to fully appreciate its flavor.

VARIATION

For a creamy soup, replace one cup of stock with pouring cream, and add it at the end of Step 2 (it will split if over-heated).

Peach and Basil Bruschetta

This bruschetta is the epitome of summer, balancing the sweetness of ripe peaches with creamy mozzarella and fresh, aromatic basil.

Makes 2 to 4 servings

1 cup (200 g) ripe peach, cut into ¼-inch (0.5 cm) dice
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil plus ½ tbsp extra
4½ oz (130 g) buffalo mozzarella, cut into ½-inch (1 cm) dice
15 fresh basil leaves, roughly chopped or torn
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
4¾-inch (2 cm) slices ciabatta bread

In a medium bowl, combine the peach, 1 tbsp olive oil, cheese, basil, and a pinch of salt and pepper. Stir thoroughly. Let the mixture stand for 10 minutes to 1 hour to allow the flavors to develop.

Brush both sides of the ciabatta slices with the additional olive oil. Heat a griddle pan or large skillet over medium-high heat and toast the ciabatta for 2 minutes per side, or until crisp and golden.

Top each piece of toasted ciabatta with the peach mixture. Finish with an extra grind of black pepper.

Serve immediately.

TIP

For an extra layer of flavor, drizzle the bruschetta with balsamic glaze just before serving.

VARIATION

To make a classic tomato bruschetta, simply replace the quantity of peach with ripe vine tomatoes.



Baked Feta with Chile and Honey

This combination of salty feta, spicy chile, and hot sweet honey is a hard to beat. You can prepare the dish beforehand, then pop it in the oven for 25 minutes and serve directly on the table. The use of fresh and dried chile together covers a wide spectrum of chile flavor profiles. Serve with crusty bread as an appetizer or as a side dish to a main course (try it with Greek beef, see page xxx).

Makes 4 servings as a side

Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C)

8-inch (20cm) glass baking dish, lightly greased

- 2 blocks feta (14 oz/400 g total), drained of liquid
- 3.5 oz (100 g) cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 fresh long red chili, finely diced
- ½ tsp (2 mL) Aleppo pepper or mild pepper flakes
- 1 tsp (5 mL) lemon zest
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) olive oil
- 1½ tbsp (22 mL) runny honey
- ½ tsp (2 mL) black sesame seeds, for garnish (optional)

Place feta blocks in oven dish. Scatter cherry tomatoes around the cheese.

Evenly top with fresh and dried chile and lemon zest.

Drizzle olive oil and honey evenly over the feta and tomatoes. Place in the middle of the preheated oven and bake for 25 minutes until golden and feta is spoon soft.

Serve immediately.

TIPS

Ensure you use runny honey to achieve the right texture for drizzling over the feta.

No salt is needed as feta is very salty.



Simple Chile Lime Chicken Stir-Fry

This quick and flavorful stir-fry combines tender chicken with the zesty freshness of lime and the heat of red chile. Serve with Allspice Roasted Sweet Potato (page xxx) for a healthy mid-week meal.

Makes 2 servings

- 1 lb (500 g) chicken breast, cut into 1-inch (2.5 cm) cubes
- 1 long red chile, quartered lengthwise, then finely diced
- 1 large clove garlic, peeled and sliced
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) lime juice
- 1 tsp lime zest
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

In a medium bowl, combine the chicken, chile, garlic, brown sugar, lime juice, and lime zest. Stir to coat evenly, then let marinate for 15 minutes at room temperature or overnight in the refrigerator.

Heat the vegetable oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chicken with marinade to the skillet. Cook, stirring continuously, for 7 to 8 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through.

Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Serve immediately.

VARIATION

For an Asian stir-fry, replace the vegetable oil with sesame oil, and add 1 tbsp of soy sauce to the marinade in Step 1. Serve with steamed rice and Chinese greens.

Steak with Chimichurri Salsa

This flavorful steak is paired with a vibrant South American chimichurri sauce, featuring fresh parsley, cilantro, and a good dose of heat from dried chile flakes. Serve with Roast Garlic White Bean Mash (page xxx), or buttered rice.

Makes 2 servings

Food processor

Griddle pan

Why cook steak from room temperature? Allowing it to come to room temperature ensures more uniform cooking throughout, and the cold steak is not lowering the heat of the pan, giving the ultimate seal and crust.

STEAK

- 2 sirloin steaks, at room temperature
- ½ tsp salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tbsp butter

CHIMICHURRI SAUCE

- 1 cup (250 mL) fresh parsley
- ½ cup (125 mL) fresh cilantro
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 tsp (5 mL) hot pepper flakes
- ½ tsp (2 mL) sea salt
- ⅓ cup (100 mL) olive oil
- 3 tbsp (50 mL) red wine vinegar

In the small bowl of a food processor, combine parsley, cilantro, garlic, hot pepper flakes, sea salt, olive oil, and red wine vinegar. Blitz until a rough paste forms. Set aside.

Heat a griddle pan over high heat. Season both sides of the steaks with salt and pepper.

Add butter to the pan and cook steaks for 2 minutes on each side. Continue cooking for a further 4 minutes on each side for medium-rare.

Remove the steaks from the pan and let rest for 2 minutes. Serve with a generous dollop of chimichurri sauce on top.

TIPS

Leftover chimichurri sauce can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 3 weeks or frozen for up to 3 months.

For a bolder flavor, let the chimichurri sit for an hour before serving.

Chile Chocolate

One Bowl Brownie

Brownies are one of those universally popular recipes that can be made in no time without any fuss. This version is infused with a touch of chile, complementing the richness of dark chocolate.

Makes 25 brownies

Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C)

Grease and line an 8-inch (20 cm) square baking pan with parchment paper

8 oz (250 g) dark (70%) chocolate, broken into pieces

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup (150 mL) unsalted butter, cut into pieces

1 cup (250 mL) superfine (caster) sugar

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup (150 mL) all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp ground mild chile (such as pasilla, ancho, or Kashmiri)

1 tsp pure vanilla extract

In a heatproof bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water (double boiler), combine the chocolate and butter. Heat gently, stirring occasionally, until fully melted and smooth. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly.

Stir the sugar into the melted chocolate mixture until fully incorporated. Add the vanilla extract and chile and mix well.

Gradually fold in the flour until the batter is smooth (do not overmix).

Pour the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top with a spatula.

Bake in the preheated oven for 45 to 50 minutes, or until a skewer inserted in the center comes out with a few moist crumbs.

Let the brownies cool in the pan for 10 minutes before transferring to a wire rack. Once completely cool, cut into squares.

TIP

If you can't find superfine sugar, process granulated sugar in a food processor with the metal blade until it reaches a sand-like consistency.

VARIATION

For individual portions, pour the batter into paper muffin cups, filling them halfway, and bake for 20 minutes.

A Beginner's Guide to Flavorful Cooking

Unlock the secrets to vibrant, mouth-watering meals with *How to Add Flavor* the perfect guide for novice cooks looking to elevate their culinary skills. With just 16 key spices and herbs—ranging from aromatic basil to earthy turmeric—this book shows you how easy it is to enhance the flavors of your favorite dishes.

Learn the unique aromas, flavors, and ideal pairings of each spice and herb. From allspice and bay leaves to thyme and cumin, you'll discover how a sprinkle or pinch can transform your cooking. A special "Project Spices" section takes you through four versatile recipes—Skillet Chicken Breast, Classic Pot Roast, Salmon Parcels, and Crispy Fried Tofu—demonstrating how the flavor profile of each dish can change dramatically with just a few variations in spices and herbs.

An in-depth sidebar on salt and pepper, the essential foundation of any dish, offers valuable insights into using these two pantry staples to their full potential. Finally, explore 60 easy-to-follow recipes, organized by the featured spice or herb, helping you build confidence in the kitchen while mastering the art of flavor.

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