

# Seasoning with Herbs and Spices

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## Introduction

Herbs and spices have been used for centuries to flavor food. We now know that these seasonings also have health benefits. By using herbs and spices, we can reduce the amount of sugar, salt, or fat in food preparation to make it more healthful. Herbs and spices also contain powerful disease-fighting antioxidants.

## Lesson Objectives

- Increase participants' knowledge of using herbs and spices to flavor specific foods.
- Encourage participants to use herbs and spices to increase flavor without added salt, fat, or sugar.
- Share herb and spice historical lore.

## Intended Audiences

This lesson is appropriate for FCE groups, 4-H Foods project members, cooking classes, nutrition programs, or self-study.

## Before the Lesson

- Read the Fact Sheet MF2920, *Seasoning with Herbs and Spices*.
- Look for favorite recipes in your collections or popular sources that use herbs and spices. Try some to recommend to the group. Or ask the participants ahead of time to bring their favorites.
- Collect samples of different herb and spice packages to discuss with the group.
- Plan to serve a simple cookie recipe made with different spices as a sample.
- Consider asking a Master Gardener, K-State Research and Extension horticulture agent, or someone from a local greenhouse to do a session on growing herbs.

## Pronunciation Tip

In the United States, pronounce “herb” without the “h” — “erb.”

## Presenting the Lesson

To start the presentation, say:

“Would you choose taste or nutrition if you could have only one in the food you eat? We teach nutrition, media promotes nutrition, and we all know it is very important to eat right; but surveys show that taste is still most important to most people. Today we’re going to learn how you can have both! By seasoning with herbs and spices you can add flavor and increase nutrition in your dishes.”

Possible activities for the group include:

- Guess the seasoning — put herbs or spices in small cups with numbers, have members guess what they are.
- Plan a workshop to make seasoning mixes from herbs or spices purchased in bulk, then bag into smaller amounts for each participant.
- Taste different spices on rice.
- Buy herbs or spices in bulk, divide into smaller packages, and split the costs.

To add interest to the presentation, expand on a lesser known aspect of the lesson, such as:

- Growing your own herb garden — Refer to publication MF2579, *Growing Herbs for Home Use*, or Kansas Extension Master Gardener materials.
- Preserving herbs (dry or freeze) — Refer to University of Georgia, National Center for Home Food Preservation ([www.uga.edu/nchfp](http://www.uga.edu/nchfp)) or the *Ball Blue Book Guide to Preserving*.

- Lore and history of herbs — Refer to *Herb and Spice History*, [http://consumerhorticulture.psu.edu/files/herb\\_spice\\_history.pdf](http://consumerhorticulture.psu.edu/files/herb_spice_history.pdf), from Penn State.
- Different types of cinnamon — People in the United States are used to cassia cinnamon, which is grown in Indonesia. It generally has a stronger flavor and aroma; some consider it harsher. Ceylon cinnamon is the typical cinnamon used in other parts of the world; it has a mild, citrusy flavor. Saigon or Vietnamese cinnamon is a stronger, bolder flavor and is becoming more popular in the United States. Try a spice or snickerdoodle cookie recipe with different types of cinnamon and let participants taste the differences.
- Flavored vinegars — Basic instructions: Use about 1 cup of fresh herbs for every 2 cups of vinegar. White wine vinegar works well with most herbs; red wine vinegar is best with stronger herbs such as rosemary and oregano. Use rice wine vinegar for delicately flavored herbs. Gather and wash herbs, then dry with a salad spinner and a clean kitchen towel. Fill dry, sterilized jars with herbs. Heat vinegar in a nonaluminum saucepan just until bubbles appear (do not boil). Remove from heat and pour into prepared jars, completely submerging herbs. Cool completely. Cover and refrigerate one week to intensify flavor. Strain vinegar with a wire-mesh strainer lined with a coffee filter into dry, sterilized glass bottles. You may add fresh herb sprigs. Tightly seal with nonmetallic lids or corks; store in the refrigerator up to one month.
- Flavored Oils — Oil-based mixtures of garlic, herbs, or dried vegetables can pose a health hazard if not kept refrigerated. The FDA recommendation is that these be made fresh for use and not left at room temperatures. Refrigerate leftovers for use within 10 days, freeze, or discard.

## Lore of Herbs and Spices

Herbs and spices have long been used around the world for medicinal and culinary purposes. Herbs are mentioned in Genesis and throughout the Bible, and are noted in studies of ancient civilizations.

With the use of herbs and spices, symbolic beliefs associated with them developed. For example, rosemary was given to others for remembrance. Sage was a sacred herb of the Romans, believed to increase mental ability. Ancient Greeks thought of dill as a sign of wealth. Basil is a sign of love in Italy; some believe that if you put some basil in your wallet, you will attract money, success, and prosperity.

— *Herb and Spice History*

- Plants for medicinal purposes — See the fact sheet *Magic, Medicine, or Mystery* (MF2378).

## Additional K-State Research and Extension resources

*Beef: Choices, Preparation and Flavor* (MF2888) for information on marinades.

Family Nutrition Program (FNP) display and handout available from K-State Research and Extension.

Food preservation information — Rapid Response Center

<http://www.rrc.ksu.edu/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=18>

Nutrition information — Human Nutrition website

<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/humannutrition/>

## Community Awareness Activities

Present the lesson to another group that would not normally use these materials.

Plan a “seasoning swap.” Ask members to bring those seasonings they have extra jars of, or have found they don’t like or use, and exchange them. Or donate them to a community kitchen.

Set up the FNP display “Seasoning with Herbs and Spices” in a public location, such as the courthouse hallway.

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## References and Resources

Consumer Reports diet and nutrition resources  
<http://www.consumerreports.org/health/healthy-living/diet-nutrition/index.htm>

*Cooking with Herbs, Spices, and Seasonings*, bulletin, FDNS-NE 113, 2002, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service

*Flavored Oils and Vinegars*, Colorado State University Extension, bulletin #9.340, <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/PUBS/FOODNUT/09340.html>

"Flavored Vinegars," *Southern Living*, July 2009

*Food Reflections*, Jan/Feb 2002; and *Add a Little Spice (& Herbs) to Your Life*, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County, Alice Henneman, MS

*Herb and Spice History*, Penn State College of Agriculture Sciences Cooperative Extension, Dept. of Horticulture

IFIC Foundation — "Good Food. Good Flavor. Good Health." *Food Insight*, March/April 2008

K-State Research and Extension — Mary Meck Higgins, Karen Blakeslee, and Kathy Walsten

McCormick Science Institute  
[www.spicesforhealth.com](http://www.spicesforhealth.com)

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute  
[www.nhlb.nih.gov](http://www.nhlb.nih.gov)

"Sleuthing Cinnamon," *Cook's Illustrated*, Oct/Nov 2009

"Spice it up: Disease fighting flavors." Consumer Reports, October 2007; <http://www.consumerreports.org/health/healthy-living/diet-nutrition/healthy-foods/disease-fighting-spices-1-06/overview/index.htm>



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