

The Health Benefits of Herbs and Spices

Herbs and spices are not necessarily the center of the plate, but they pack a surprisingly big nutritional punch.

In fact, herbs and spices could be regarded as the first real “functional foods” because they have been grown and cultivated for thousands of years—as far back as 5000 BC—and have a long history of medicinal use. Modern-day researchers are beginning to prove that these culinary treasures can help consumers eat healthier diets by adding flavor without calories, fat or sugar and by providing healthful phytonutrient rich antioxidants.



USING HERBS AND SPICES: PINCHES OF FLAVOR WITH BIG HEALTH BENEFITS†

HERB OR SPICE	POTENTIAL HEALTH BENEFITS	SUGGESTED USES
<i>Garlic</i> 	Antioxidant, lowers cholesterol and blood pressure, raises HDL cholesterol, anti-inflammatory, prevents cerebral aging, anti-clotting, boosts immunity	World cuisine, meat, seafood, poultry, stir-fry: use in marinades, dressings, sauces, salads, rice dishes and casseroles; also use in slow-cooked meals and as a rub for meats, toppings (bruschetta) and dips, vegetables, beans, tofu.
<i>Ginger</i> 	Antioxidant, improves osteoarthritis of the knee, anti-emetic, anti-inflammatory, boosts immunity, antimicrobial	Asian style cuisine, meat, seafood, poultry, stir-fry, curries: use in marinades, chutneys and desserts; also use to flavor fruit smoothies and tea, soups, vegetables, cocoa, fruits.
<i>Lemon Grass</i> 	Antioxidant, anti-cancer properties, anti-inflammatory	Asian style cuisine, seafood, shrimp, poultry and stir-fry; also use in soups, curries and rice dishes and noodles, tofu and custards.
<i>Cilantro</i> 	Antioxidant, digestive aid	Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin and Mexican style cuisine: use in cooked dishes, dressings, dipping sauces, salads, soups, marinades and rubs as well as shellfish.
<i>Chili</i> 	Antioxidant, enhances metabolic effects in weight management	Asian, Mediterranean, African and Latin inspired cuisine, meat, poultry, seafood: use in marinades, dipping sauces and curries, soups and stews, pasta sauces, rice and egg dishes.
<i>Basil</i> 	Antioxidant, inhibits lipid peroxidation, decreases inflammation	Mediterranean or Asian style cuisine: use with tomatoes or as a base for pesto, in salads, sauces, marinades, as a drizzle for soups and vegetables and cooked dishes.
<i>Dill</i> 	Antioxidant, antimicrobial	Mediterranean and American style cuisine: use with seafood, dipping sauces, potato salads, vegetables, chicken, soups and marinades.
<i>Parsley</i> 	Antioxidant, antimicrobial	World cuisine: use with potato or pasta salads; also use raw or cooked with meats, vegetables, shellfish and seafood.
<i>Oregano</i> 	Antioxidant, antimicrobial	Mediterranean style cuisine, meat, fish, poultry: use with vegetables, breads, salad dressing, pasta, sauces and marinades.
<i>Marjoram</i> 	Antioxidant, antimicrobial	Mediterranean, African, Middle Eastern and American cuisines: use with meat, fish, poultry, vegetables, breads, salad dressings and stuffings.
<i>Thyme</i> 	Antioxidant, inhibits bone resorption	Mediterranean style cuisine: use in soups, casseroles, stuffings, salad dressings and marinades, rubs & vegetables.
<i>Rosemary</i> 	Antioxidant, inhibits bone resorption, anti-carcinogen, anti-inflammatory	Mediterranean style cuisine, meat, fish, poultry: use with vegetables, breads, salad dressings, sauces, fall fruits and rice dishes.

†Table 1. The potential health effects of herbs and spices assessed in the scientific literature – note that there are limited human data of variable quality; most studies have been carried out in vitro or in animal models



Little Herbs and Spices, *Big Benefits*

Researchers have isolated many bioactive compounds in herbs and spices, and many act as potent antioxidants. The Australian National Centre of Excellence in Functional Foods, working in conjunction with Australian researchers, concluded that the antioxidant capacity of herbs and spices compare very favorably with that of fresh fruits and vegetables¹.

A recent study that analyzed the antioxidant capacity of more than 1,000 foods in the US food supply found that many herbs and spices are among the top antioxidant sources. Among major categories of foods, herbs and spices were the most concentrated sources followed by nuts and seeds².

In addition to delivering antioxidants, herbs and spices add variety, flavor, color and aroma to dishes. Herbs and spices may also offer synergistic effects with other bioactive components of foods, thereby increasing the health payoffs.

Since herbs and spices are naturally low or free of calories, fat, saturated fat, sugars and sodium, they are a perfect way to increase the flavor of foods without additional calories. In fact, using herbs and spices can help reduce the negative nutrients in consumers' diets.

Nutrition researchers in the United States and Australia are advocating that herbs and spices gain more attention in the food guidance systems and national nutrition education programs to help consumers incorporate beneficial herbs and spices into their daily diets³.

Fast Facts

about Herbs and Spices:

- 🌿 Herbs and spices are among the richest sources of antioxidants and on a weight basis, are higher than many fruits and vegetables.
- 🌿 Herbs and spices can help consumers reduce excess fat and sugars in their diet by adding flavor without the unwanted calories.
- 🌿 Ancient healers have used herbs and spices since 5000 BC. Even the Father of Medicine, Hippocrates, had over 300 herb and spice remedies for various conditions.
- 🌿 In Ayurvedic medicine, ginger is considered a universal therapeutic.
- 🌿 Fresh herbs are best when added toward the end of cooking; parsley can be added anytime.
- 🌿 Garlic is best when it is chopped or mashed; it will burn and turn bitter if overheated.
- 🌿 The amount of fresh herbs needed is usually 2-4 times more than dried herbs. Use Gourmet Garden herbs as you would fresh herbs.

The words "herb" and "spice" are often used interchangeably, but they are botanically very different. Herbs are generally thought of as from the leaf, while spices are any other part of the plant, like buds (e.g., cloves), bark (e.g., cinnamon), roots (e.g., ginger), berries (e.g., peppercorns) and aromatic seeds (e.g., cumin).



GOURMET GARDEN

A fresh herb garden in your refrigerator

Gourmet Garden herbs and spices are picked fresh, washed, chopped and sealed in unique squeezable tubes. Gourmet Garden herbs are not cooked or dried and therefore retain their fresh flavor, texture, color and nutritional value, including powerful antioxidants.

Refrigeration and antioxidants extend the shelf life for up to 3 months from opening. They contain no artificial colors or flavors and are GMO free.

The antioxidant capacity of Gourmet Garden herbs and spices are generally as good as fresh herbs⁴.

References: ¹ Baghurst K, Tapsell L, Inge K et al. Position Paper: Herbs and Spices an integral part of the daily diet, August 2006. Methodology: ORAC assay; 10-11. ² Halvorsen BL, Carlsen MH, Phillips KM, et al. Content of redox-active compounds (i.e. antioxidants) in foods consumed in the United States. Am J clin Nutr 2006; 84:94-135. Methodology: FRAP assay ³ Baghurst K, Tapsell L, Inge K et al. Position Paper: Herbs and Spices an integral part of the daily diet, August 2006; 04. ⁴ Leach D, Hunter D. Unpublished data on Australian Herbs & Spices analyzed by the Centre of Phytochemistry & Pharmacology, Southern Cross University, Lismore. August 2006.