



Add Flavor with Herbs and Spices

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Herbs and spices add flavor and color to food without adding salt, fat, or sugar. The terms “herbs” and “spices” are often used interchangeably and are sometimes referred to as “seasonings,” however, they are different.



- **Herbs** are the leaves of low growing shrubs and include parsley, chives, thyme, basil, oregano, rosemary, and more. Herbs can be purchased dried, fresh or as a paste.
- **Spices** come from the bark, roots, buds, seeds, berries, or fruit of plants and trees. Spices include cinnamon, ginger, onion, garlic, cloves, black pepper, paprika, and more.

Additional Ways to Add Flavor

- **Seasoning blends** include a mixture of spices and herbs such as seasoning salt, Italian seasoning, taco seasoning, and poultry seasoning. Check labels to see if “salt” or “sodium” are listed among the ingredients if you are watching your sodium intake.
- **Rubs** are a mixture of spices and can be wet or dry. Wet rubs usually have a bit of oil or other moist ingredients added such as mustard. Dry rubs are mixtures of dry spices and herbs that are worked into the surfaces of meat, poultry, or fish.
- **Marinades** are used to tenderize meats and contain herbs and spices, oil, and acid such as yogurt, citrus juice, or vinegar.

Approximate equivalent amounts of different forms of herbs:

- 1 Tablespoon finely cut fresh herbs
- 1 teaspoon crumbled dried herbs
- ¼ to ½ teaspoon ground dried herbs

Fascinating Flavor Fact: The reason for Columbus’ voyage in 1492 was to seek a more direct passage to the rich spices of Asia.

Experiment with Herbs and Spices:

- Add fresh mint and lemon to a glass of ice water.
- Omit the salt when cooking pasta and flavor with basil, oregano, and parsley.
- For more flavor, add spices to uncooked dishes, such as salads, several hours before serving.
- Introduce children to herbs and spices with easy flavor combinations such as apples with cinnamon, bananas with nutmeg and chicken with rosemary.
- Start a small herb garden or plant a few herbs in containers. Children will love watching them grow!

Source: Fresh Herbs, Nebraska Extension:
<https://food.unl.edu/article/fresh-herbs>

This article was peer reviewed and updated in 2025. Check out the Food Fun for Young Children website at:
<http://go.unl.edu/food-fun>