

The Delicious Kitchen Guide to a Well-Stocked Spice Pantry

Spices are an essential part of any healthy and delicious kitchen. Not only do they add loads of flavor, with minimal calories, or sodium (in most cases), spices are also nutrient powerhouses, loaded with antioxidants for cardiovascular protection, cancer prevention, memory and anti-aging benefits among others. This guide will show you *how* to stock your spice pantry, *what* to stock it with, and *why* you should use spices in your everyday cooking {health benefits}. *Now let's get spicy!*

How: Getting Started Stocking Your Spice Pantry

1. Start fresh by taking inventory of the spices you already have on hand.
2. Toss any ground spices that are over 6 months old {max 1 year}, as ground spices lose their freshness quickly. Whole spices retain their flavor up to 5 years, but use the "sniff test" to determine if you should keep or toss.
3. Store spices in their original containers, or in airtight spice containers such as these.
4. Keep spices in a cool dry space.
5. Once you've weeded out the old, stock your kitchen with fresh versions of the essentials listed below.
6. If you're so inclined, and you have a large spice collection like I do, I highly recommend keeping them in alphabetical order :-)

FYI: Whole spices can be used "as is" or ground with a mortar and pestle, or a coffee/spice grinder. To intensify their flavor, you can toast spices in a small, heavy sauce pan over medium heat, making sure to constantly stir them until they give off their delicious aroma.

What: Essential Spices to Stock in Your Pantry

1. Allspice
2. Black Peppercorns
3. Chili Powder
4. Cinnamon
5. Cloves
6. Cumin
7. Curry Powder
8. Ginger
9. Nutmeg
10. Paprika
11. Red Pepper (Crushed)
12. Turmeric

EXTRAS: Technically not spices, but these seasonings and herbs will help round-out your "spice pantry": Bay leaves, Fennel Seed {Makes a great breath freshener!}, Kosher Salt, Garlic Powder, Mustard Seed Onion Powder, Oregano, Rosemary, Tarragon, & Thyme.

Why: Health Benefits of Spices

1. **Chili Peppers** may help give your metabolism a boost! Capsaicin, the pungent compound in hot chilies kicks up your metabolism, indeed studies have shown that a spicy dish, such as chili, can temporarily rev up your metabolism by 8 %. While that's a minimal boost, every little bit helps! Capsaicin may also lower the risk of ulcers
2. **Cinnamon** has been shown in some studies to help people with type 2 diabetes control their blood sugar. Research has shown mixed results, however in one study, volunteers were given 1 to 6 grams of cinnamon per day (1 gram of ground cinnamon is 1/2 teaspoon), and were able to reduce their blood sugar levels by 24%. People with liver damage should take caution, however, because large amounts of cinnamon may increase liver problems.
3. **Cumin**, a spice commonly used in both Indian and Mexican cuisine, has been studied for it's potential cancer preventing abilities. In addition, cumin seeds may help with digestion by stimulating the secretion of pancreatic enzymes.
4. **Ginger** is known as an anti-inflammatory and helps boost circulation. It has also been found to be helpful in settling an upset tummy associated with surgery, pregnancy, and motion sickness.
5. **Turmeric** is being studied for it's potential anti-inflammatory, anticancer, and antioxidant effects. In addition, it has been found to be helpful in fighting the common cold and respiratory problems, and research is being done on it's potential to help manage Alzheimer's disease.