

# Essential Herbs & Spices for a Healthy Kitchen

## Introduction

Everyone has their preferences on which herbs and spices they like to eat and cook with on a regular basis. After many years of preparing homecooked meals for my family, I've come up with a list of 15 herbs and spices that are essential to any kitchen.

Whether you are making dinner or baking some delicious desserts, you will probably need something to add flavor and seasoning to the food. But did you know that, in addition to adding flavor, many of these common herbs and spices have health benefits?

## Basil

There are many varieties of Basil and they each have slightly different advantages. Overall, Basil can help with the following:

- Anti-Inflammatory
- Antioxidant
- Cancer-fighter
- Pan-Reducer
- Fever-reducer
- Prevent diabetes
- Protect the liver
- Anti-stress
- Immune-booster

Basil is used in many cultural cuisines including Italian, Indian, Thai, and Vietnamese. It's used in sauces, to flavor meats, and as dressings. The most common recipes with basil are a marinara sauce, pesto, and with oil for a bread dipping sauce.

# Essential Herbs & Spices for a Healthy Kitchen

## Black Peppercorn

Peppercorn has become the most widely traded spice in the world. Peppercorn is actually the fruit of the black pepper vine that is dried out.

- Inhibits growth of cancer cells
- Helps digestion
- Eliminate heartburn
- Anti-oxidant
- Anti-bacterial
- Stabilize blood sugar levels
- Combats obesity
- Lower blood pressure
- Anti-inflammatory

Peppercorn is such a popular spice because it is very versatile. Most of the time it is used cracked by crushing with a mortar and pestle or freshly ground in a pepper mill. We used it freshly ground in any recipe that calls for pepper.

## Cayenne Pepper

In addition to adding a bit of spice to a meal, cayenne pepper has many health benefits and has been used for thousands of years as a medicinal herb.

- Helps digestion
- Relieves migraine pain
- Prevents blood clots
- Detoxifying
- Weight loss
- Boosts metabolism
- Fights cold and flu
- Prevents allergies
- Anti-fungal

Cayenne pepper is a perfect addition to meats, pasta, and vegetables. Just start small because it has a very strong flavor and can add too much spice for some (like me) if you go overboard.

# Essential Herbs & Spices for a Healthy Kitchen

## Chili Powder

Chili powder is similar in production to cayenne pepper and is made from fresh peppers that are dried and pulverized. It can also add a kick to a meal, but in a different flavor than cayenne pepper. There are also different health benefits of chili powder.

- Eye health
- Red blood cell formation
- Improves cognitive function
- Lowers blood pressure
- Helps digestion
- Antioxidant
- Cancer-fighting
- Hair and skin health

Chili powder is often used in Tex-Mex cuisines (my favorite use!), Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Tahi foods. Again, a little goes a long way with chili powder.

## Cilantro

I know cilantro is one of those that people either love or hate it. There doesn't seem to much in between. My family is all in the "love it" category, so we use it in our meals and have it growing in the herb garden. Some of the health benefits of cilantro include:

- Detoxify heavy metals
- Antioxidant
- Lowers anxiety
- Improves sleep
- Lowers blood sugar
- Protects from cardiovascular disease
- Prevents UTI
- Supports digestive system
- Skin health

The seeds of cilantro are known as coriander and those have their own set of health benefits but aren't as widely used in cooking, so I focused on just the cilantro leaves. Cilantro is commonly used in cuisines from Mexico, Asia, India, and the Mediterranean.

# Essential Herbs & Spices for a Healthy Kitchen

## Cinnamon

When I think of cinnamon, I think of Fall and Winter and the delicious baked goods that come with those seasons. But around the world, cinnamon is used daily for its many health benefits and is ranked highest in antioxidant levels among medicinal spices.

- Antioxidant
- Anti-inflammatory
- Heart health
- Fights diabetes
- Cognitive health and function
- Lowers cancer risk
- Anti-microbial, Anti-biotic, Anti-fungal, Anti-viral
- Dental health & freshens breath
- Skin health
- Fights allergies

Cinnamon can also be used to sweeten recipes with the added sugar. I've used cinnamon in a concoction with warm milk for a sore throat in the winter and it helped that, too. Overall, cinnamon is one of the best seasoning to work into your diet, and now after doing this research I am going to find more ways to get it in our meals.

## Cumin

Popular in Mediterranean and Southwest Asian dishes, cumin is made from chilis and tamales giving it a spicy and earthy flavor. When I smell it, I am reminded of packaged taco seasoning mix. Cumin has been used for medicinal purposes for many years, and new benefits have been recently discovered.

- Helps digestion
- Fights anemia (high in iron)
- Antioxidants
- Prevents diabetes
- Antimicrobial

There are a few other benefits to cumin but only when taken as a supplement. Using it as a seasoning will still give you some of these health improvements.

# Essential Herbs & Spices for a Healthy Kitchen

## Garlic Powder

For many centuries, garlic has been used for its medicinal value. Garlic is a popular home remedy because it is fairly cheap and widely available. Many of the benefits come from crushed or diced garlic but some are still present in garlic powder.

- Antioxidants
- Reduce risk of heart disease
- Anti-inflammatory
- Lowers blood pressure
- Reduced risk of colon and stomach cancer

Garlic is used in a wide variety of foods from almost every culture. It adds a strong but unique flavor to a dish and doesn't take much.

## Ginger

The uses of ginger in medicine can be traced back to ancient Chinese, Roman, Greek, Arabic, and Sanskrit documentation. And it's still used today for its health benefits which tells me it must work well if it's lasted that long. It was a life-saver for me when I had morning sickness during my pregnancy with Ryan!

- Treats nausea
- Anti-fungal
- Protects against stomach ulcers
- Lowers menstrual pain
- Reduces blood sugar levels
- Anti-inflammatory
- Lowers cholesterol
- Improves cognitive function
- Anti-bacterial
- Helps digestion

Ginger is great to use either fresh from the root or in a ground powder form. I typically find it in Asian recipes, but it can be used in so much more than that. I haven't cooked with it often, but plan to start adding it into more of our meals.

# Essential Herbs & Spices for a Healthy Kitchen

## Italian Seasoning

While “Italian Seasoning” isn’t one particular herb or spice, it’s a delicious combination of them that almost makes it a superfood of spices. The Italian seasoning that I have includes marjoram, oregano, thyme, rosemary, basil, and sage. A few of these are ones I don’t cook with individually, so I’ll list the benefits of those.

- Anti-oxidant
- Anti-Microbial
- Helps produce red blood cells
- Increase blood flow and oxygenation of organs
- Helps metabolism
- Pain relief
- Anti-inflammatory
- Memory improvement

I feel like it’s obvious that the most common cuisines that use this are Italian dishes, but it can also be added to other Mediterranean meals as well. Having the mixed seasoning makes it easy to add a bit to a meal without having to purchase all of the individual herbs.

## Onion Powder

Made from dehydrated onions, onion powder contains some of the nutrients of a fresh onion but loses some of it in the drying process.

- Low sodium
- Regulates blood pressure
- Helps digestion
- Muscle health
- Reduced risk of stroke
- Anti-oxidant

Onion powder, since it is in a concentrated form, has a lot of flavor in just a small amount and goes a long way. This can be used as a substitute in almost dish that calls for onion as long as you make sure to put in the correct ratio and don’t overdo it.

# Essential Herbs & Spices for a Healthy Kitchen

## Oregano

Originating in the Mediterranean, oregano is a leafy herb that has been used for its flavor in foods and medicinal purposes for thousands of years. It was used as far back as Hippocrates and the Ancient Greeks. Oregano can be used topically or ingested (such as in our foods).

- Anti-bacterial
- Anti-inflammatory
- Protect against cancer
- Manage diabetes
- Treat infections and illnesses
- Helps menstrual cramps
- Repels insects

Oregano can be used in a variety of ways in the kitchen. It's great for adding flavor to meats or marinades and can be used in stuffing or bread dough. Too much can make a food bitter, so add a little at a time until you have your desired flavor.

## Paprika

For many years paprika has been used for medicinal purposes, but new discoveries recently prove that it helps with a much larger variety of ailments than originally known. Paprika was discovered in the New World in the 1400s and brought back to Europe, Africa, and Asia where it became extremely popular in Hungary where they are especially known for their goulash with paprika.

- Anti-oxidants
- Anti-inflammatory
- Aids in autoimmune conditions
- Treat and prevent cancer
- Regulate blood sugar levels
- Eye health
- Lower blood pressure
- Treat anemia

Paprika is made from ground red-colored peppers such as bell pepper, chili pepper, and cayenne peppers. Many cultures use paprika in a large variety of ways. In the US it's commonly used on deviled eggs and in bbq recipes, ketchup, meats, potato salad, and similar dishes. Mexican cuisines uses it for sauces and salsas. Across the world, paprika is used to spice up everything from seafood to rice.

# Essential Herbs & Spices for a Healthy Kitchen

## Parsley

Parsley could be considered another superfood among the herbs and spices. It benefits your health in so many ways and is easy to add to many different recipes.

- Anti-inflammatory
- Anti-oxidant
- Prevents anemia
- Helps digestion
- Prevents kidney stones
- Boosts immunity
- Skin health
- Prevent cancer
- Detoxifying
- Anti-bacterial
- Anti-fungal
- Bone health
- Eye health
- Heart health
- Balances hormones

Parsley is a versatile plant that can be used in pasta, soups, stews, dips, marinades, salads, and smoothies. It can be used to add flavor to meats, potatoes, rice, and vegetables. Parsley is often added as a garnish to many dishes but can be used as an ingredient in a meal as well.

# Essential Herbs & Spices for a Healthy Kitchen

## Red Chili Pepper Flakes

For centuries, cooks in Southern Italy have been using red peppers to spice up their pasta and pizza even before knowing the plethora of health benefits that the plant gives us.

- Soothe upset stomach & ulcers
- Heart health
- Lowers cholesterol
- Reduced risk of stroke
- Regulates diabetes
- Anti-oxidants
- Immunity boosting

Adding red chili pepper flakes or crushed red pepper to your meal adds a spice to the foods. As with any seasoning, take it slowly to start as it can become overwhelming in high quantities.

### Sources:

<https://draxe.com/>

<https://www.dovemed.com/healthy-living/natural-health/7-health-benefits-of-chili-powder/>

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/9-benefits-of-cumin>

<https://www.livestrong.com/article/268286-benefits-of-garlic-powder/>

<https://www.eduardosenoteca.com/blog/post/the-surprising-health-benefits-of-italian-seasoning>

<https://www.livestrong.com/article/4697-need-health-benefits-onions/>

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/266259.php>

<https://healthyeating.sfgate.com/health-benefits-crushed-red-pepper-7217.html>