

# Add a little spice for flavor and healthy living

By Jodi Schneider  
Correspondent

It seems strange for people to think of it today, but two thousand years ago, Pliny the Elder left written records indicating the price of cinnamon to be worth roughly 15 times the value of silver on a weight basis. Nutmeg was once worth more by weight than gold, and in the 16th century pepper was once so valuable that it could be used to pay the rent.

Pepper and cinnamon may no longer be luxuries for most, and spices may have lost the allure that once placed them alongside jewels and precious metals, but the incredible history remains, and so does the wide variety of exotic flavors, colors and aromas that made spices so valuable in the first place.

Most spices used in cooking began as medical ingredients, and throughout the Middle Ages spices were used as both medicines and condiments.

Spices are aromatic, natural substances that come from various parts of plants, such as the root, bud, or seed.

Many seasonings in your kitchen cabinet are loaded with enzymes, flavonoids, and other natural substances that can do wonders for your overall health.

Spices add rich flavor to food without adding any calories, fat, sugar

or salt. In addition, research shows that spices contribute to health just as much as fruits and vegetables, providing antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anti-bacterial properties.

There are a lot of spices out there that can provide you with health benefits and countless ways to vary the flavors of healthy food to make it more interesting, delicious, and nutritious.

Cinnamon, a popular spice, is especially great for people who have high blood sugar. It lends a sweet taste to food without adding sugar, and studies indicate it can lower blood sugar levels in people with type 2 diabetes.

Turmeric is best known for its use in Indian curry dishes and has become a trendy superfood for its ability to reduce inflammation — a common cause of discomfort and illness.

Ginger, a root, is a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent, and it works great as a natural remedy for nausea, bloating, and overall gut health.

Seasoning with spices can be intimidating, especially if the recipe doesn't call for it or only calls for a certain amount. It takes practice, but by understanding the flavors of spices, and tasting their unique flavors, you'll know how to enhance any meal with any kind of spice.

Savory Spice Shop owner Matt Perry knows exactly which of the more than 200 spice blends he and

his wife, Betsy, should use when preparing their dinner at home in Bend. Perry proudly calls himself the spice merchant of the Old Mill District.

He told *The Nugget*, "I am a strong proponent of spice blends. Especially if you are interested in the health benefits of spices. Blends are easier to use in everyday cooking and can contain a greater variety of healing spices than just trying to add individual spices. Italian herb blends can be used in almost anything to boost the flavor without adding salt. Curry blends tend to have a large amount of anti-inflammatory spices and are great for soups, stews, or roasted vegetables. There are many varieties of curry seasonings, so smell and taste them to make sure it is something you will like. Baking spice blends are also a great way to incorporate many healing spices into your morning ritual whether through coffee, tea, oatmeal, or granola."

Perry and his wife enjoy cooking together and are committed to purchasing as much of their meat and vegetables from local farms and ranches as possible.

He noted, "When I discovered Savory Spice in 2010, I was blown away by the difference that fresh herbs, spices, and spice blends made in our cooking. We became much better cooks overnight, just by introducing freshly ground herbs and spices."

Perry believes that spices are an



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER

Spices, like these at Savory Spice, not only add verve and flavor, they can be healthful.

integral part of any healthy diet.

"While there is a substantial amount of research on the health benefits of spices and anti-inflammatory properties, I believe the flavor of the spices is what can really improve your health by making the food you cook more satisfying."

Since spices make food taste better, they can bring more inspiration for home cooking of whole, unprocessed foods. More spices means that less salt and sugar are needed to make something taste good, and you might choose to stay home and cook a quick meal from whole ingredients instead of going out.

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Art Izer and Nancy Chapel-Izer can testify to the qualities of alpaca meat — and not just because they own and operate Alpaca Country Estates. After a heart attack, Art began eating alpaca instead of beef on a regular basis and, Nancy reports, within a year, his cholesterol had



hit normal levels.

Properly prepared (think game meat and don't overcook it), alpaca meat is delicious, nutritious, and an excellent alternative for a healthy lifestyle.

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