



# Mealtime Memo

## for Child Care

### Herbs and Spices

Using herbs and spices is a great way to enhance the flavor of food without adding additional fat, salt, or sugar. Although, learning to use them takes practice and can be time-consuming, if you know the common herbs and spices, understand how to use them, and are aware of how to store them, you can prepare nutritious meals filled with flavor.

Spices are prepared from the roots, buds, flowers, fruits, bark, or seeds of plants. Commonly used spices include:



Allspice  
Cardamom  
Cinnamon  
Cloves

Ginger  
M-Ace  
Mustard  
Nutmeg

Paprika  
Peppercorns  
Red Pepper

Herbs come from the leaf or soft portions of plants. Commonly used herbs include:

Anise Seed  
Basil  
Bay Leaves  
Caraway Seed  
Celery Seed  
Chives  
Cilantro (Coriander Leaves)  
Coriander

Cumin  
Dill  
Fennel Seed  
Marjoram  
Mint  
Oregano  
Parsley  
Poppy Seed

Rosemary  
Sage  
Savory  
Sesame Seed  
Tarragon  
Thyme  
Turmeric

Herbs and spices are used to enhance and add flavor to food. They give many cultural and traditional foods their characteristic flavors. For example, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, and nutmeg give apple pie its all-American flavor. Italian seasoning blends, oregano, garlic, and basil are the classic flavors for Italian cooking. Lastly, ginger, garlic, red pepper flakes, and sesame helps create the sweet and spicy flavor in Asian cuisine.

If you are unfamiliar with using herbs and spices, start by selecting recipes that already include herbs and spices in their ingredient list. Once you become more familiar with the flavors of herbs and spices, you can try adding some to enhance other recipes. A common way to begin using seasoning in a recipe is to start with 1/4 teaspoon per pound and then adjust as needed. One to three tablespoons total of herbs and spices are recommended per 50 servings. Use twice as much fresh herb as dried.

When cooking with herbs and spices, add whole spices at the beginning of cooking and discard before serving. For quick-cooking foods, add herbs and spices at the beginning of cooking, but for long cooking times, add the herbs and spices during the last 15-20 minutes for the best flavor. For cold foods, add the herbs and spices several hours before serving to let the flavors develop.

Properly storing fresh and dried herbs and spices is important to maintain flavor. Fresh herbs can be stored, loosely wrapped in a paper towel, in the refrigerator for about four days. Dried herbs and spices, stored in a cool, dry place, can keep their full flavor for 6-12 months.

Using the right herbs and spices in the correct amounts helps take food to a new level of flavor and enjoyment. For more information on specific herbs and spices and how to use them, refer to the Spices and Herbs charts available from the Institute of Child Nutrition (<http://www.theicn.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20150713034840.pdf>).

## References

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2009). *Culinary techniques for healthy school meals: Seasonings*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theicn.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100210102351.pdf>

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and USDA Team Nutrition. (n.d.). *CACFP menu planning guide*. Retrieved from: <http://fns.dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/fns/pdf/menu-planning-guide-web.pdf>

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