

Herb and Spice Blends

Almost every cuisine uses spice blends. Many, such as Italian seasoning blend or Indian curry powder, have become staples in our pantries. The list goes on with many other familiar tastes and many that may be new to us: pumpkin pie spice, everything bagel blend, Montreal steak seasoning, taco seasoning, Cajun spice blend, herbes de Provence, ras el hanout, dukkah, chili powder, creole seasoning, vadouvan spice blend, za'atar, garam masala, togarashi, and Chinese five spice powder. (See the back page for information on these blends.)

It's easy to buy a packet or jar. It's almost as easy to make your own. Most use common herbs and spices you may already have in your cabinet. You can scale a recipe to make just enough for the dish you want to cook, or make enough to have some for another day. As with all herbs and spices, you should store them in airtight containers in a cool, dark place.

Many people prefer to start with whole herbs and spices. They hold their flavor longer than already ground spices. For the sake of convenience, these recipes use ground spices. If you want to use whole, lightly toast them in a dry stainless skillet over high heat for about a minute. Grind them with a mortar and pestle or in an electric spice grinder. A lot of recipes you'll find for herb and spice blends call for salt. I prefer to leave the salt out of most of my blends and add salt as needed while cooking with them.

Homemade Chili Powder

- 3 tablespoons ground ancho chili pepper
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon Mexican oregano
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper, optional

Dill Dip Blend

- 4 tablespoons dried dill weed
- 2 tablespoons dried minced onion
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest powder
- 1 teaspoon celery seed powder

Combine two tablespoons of dill dip blend with 1 cup sour cream, 1 cup mayonnaise, and ½ teaspoon of salt. Stir well, cover, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours. Add freshly ground black pepper and additional salt to taste before serving with vegetables or pita chips.

Dry Rub for Ribs

- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 tablespoon Kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder

- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground mustard
- ½ teaspoon celery seed powder

Combine all ingredients. Spread dry rub on prepared slab of baby back ribs. Place in a glass baking dish, cover tightly with foil, and refrigerate overnight. Remove from refrigerator and preheat oven to 300 degrees. Cook covered for 2 hours, or until tender. Pour off any juices and reserve. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours. Build a medium hot charcoal fire. Combine reserved juices with your favorite barbecue sauce. Cook ribs on grill, basting frequently with barbecue sauce, until heated through and lacquered, turning occasionally, about 15 minutes.

Jerk Seasoning Mix

- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon ground cayenne pepper
- 2 teaspoons onion powder
- 2 teaspoons thyme
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves

Use on chicken, pork, or seafood.

Homemade Berbere Spice Blend

- 1 tablespoon ground cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon ground fenugreek
- 1 teaspoon ground cardamom
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground allspice
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg

Berberere is a spice blend, famously used in doro wat, an Ethiopian stewed chicken dish, and other Ethiopian dishes. I like adding it to spinach cooked with onion and bell pepper, although it's not a traditional Ethiopian dish.

Misir Wat (Lentils with Ethiopian Spice Blend)

3 tablespoon clarified butter
2 medium onions, diced
2 cloves garlic, finely minced
2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger
1 tablespoon berber spice blend
3 tablespoons tomato paste
1 cup red lentils
3 cups vegetable broth

Heat butter in a sauce pan over medium heat. Add onions and cook, stirring frequently, until translucent, about 7 minutes. Stir in garlic, ginger, and berbere spice blend. Cook 1 minute. Stir in tomato paste, lentils, and two-thirds of vegetable broth. Bring to a boil then reduce heat to low. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until lentils are done, adding additional broth as needed. Serve with Ethiopian bread (injera) or over rice.

Curried Fruit

4 tablespoons melted butter
¼ cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon curry powder
1 15-ounce can sliced peaches
1 15-ounce can apricot halves
1 20-ounce can pineapple chunks
½ cup golden raisins, optional

Combine melted butter, brown sugar, and curry powder. Drain fruit. Toss drained fruit with butter. Place in a casserole dish. Cover and bake at 375 degrees for 30 minutes.

Some additional herb and spice blends

Pumpkin Pie Spice: The ubiquitous fall favorite consisting of ground cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, allspice, and cloves.

Everything Bagel Blend: A seasoning of dried onion and garlic flakes, poppy seed, and black and white sesame seed.

Montreal Steak Seasoning: The famous Canadian blend of garlic, coriander, black pepper, cayenne pepper flakes, dill seed, and salt.

Taco Seasoning: The popular Tex-Mex blend of chili powder, cumin, garlic powder, onion powder, paprika, and black pepper.

Cajun Spice Blend: A spicy Louisiana staple with cayenne pepper, paprika, thyme, oregano, garlic powder, onion powder, and black pepper.

Herbes de Provence: A French herb blend containing savory, thyme, rosemary, basil, tarragon and lavender.

Ras el Hanout: A Moroccan spice blend consisting of cardamom, nutmeg, anise, mace, cinnamon, ginger, various peppers, turmeric, and other herbs and spices.

Dukkah: An Egyptian nut and spice blend consisting of nuts such as hazelnuts, pistachios and cashews blended with sesame seeds, coriander, fennel seeds, red pepper flakes, and dried mint.

Creole Seasoning: Consists of paprika, oregano, thyme, basil, onion powder, black pepper, and salt.

Vadouvan Spice Blend: A French curry style blend of turmeric, curry leaves, mustard seeds, fenugreek, cumin, coriander, cardamom, and other herbs and spices cooked into a paste with onion, garlic, and fresh ginger.

Za'atar: A Middle Eastern blend of thyme, sesame seeds, sumac, and other herbs and spices.

Garam Masala: An Indian blend that contains cumin, coriander, cardamom, black pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg.

Togarashi: A Japanese blend consisting of red chile flakes, dried orange peel, white sesame seeds, black sesame seeds, nori (seaweed) flakes, poppy seeds, and ginger.

Chinese Five Spice Powder: Contains cinnamon, cloves, fennel, star anise, and Szechuan peppercorns.