

# HERB STOP

## April 2010 Highlight



### What Is A Pepper?

Have you ever wondered what the difference is between a chili pepper, black pepper and paprika? Here is some information on some of these fiery hot spices and not so hot spices:

#### Green, Black and White Peppercorns

Green, black and white peppercorns are actually the fruits of a tropical vine, *piper nigrum*, a species entirely different from the capsicum peppers, (bell pepper, cayenne, chili pepper, paprika). The spiciest of this group is the black peppercorn, picked when unripe, and then dried. If instead of being dried, the unripe berries are freeze-dried or submerged in brine, it becomes the kinder, gentler green peppercorn, with its fruity olive like flavor. When the same berry is left to ripen on the vine, and then is shorn of its outer skin the milder white peppercorn is created.

#### Pink Peppercorns

Pink peppercorns are berries from a South American tree, *schinus terebinthifolius*. Pink peppercorns add mild pungency and stunning color to food. They can also be added to teas, such as chai, for a little spice.

#### Szechuan Pepper

Szechuan peppers grow in the Szechuan region of china on a large tree, but now cultivated as a shrub. It is also known as Chinese pepper, fagara and anise pepper. This aromatic dried berry has a hot woody flavor and is one of the ingredients of Chinese Five Spice powder, and is commonly used in Asian fish dishes. Dry-roasting it before use heightens the flavor. Medicinally, Szechuan peppers stimulate the spleen and stomach to assist digestion.

#### Cubeb Pepper

Cubeb pepper is also known as *piper cubeba* and is related to black pepper. Compared to pepper, cubeb is a lot more fiery and aromatic, mostly used in Indonesian cooking. Cubeb is also very popular in Egypt and other countries in the Middle East. Medicinally, cubeb berries have been known to relieve coughs, sinusitis, and throat infections, as well as for an upset stomach, indigestion and urinary tract infections.

#### Grains of Paradise

Grains of Paradise are also known as *afmomum melegueta*, once used in place of pepper, when the price of pepper became too high. Grains of Paradise can certainly be used in any dish in which black pepper is called for. Medicinally, Grains of Paradise are known to have aphrodisiac properties.

#### Chili Pepper

Chili peppers come to us from the *capsicum* family. They can be as small as a pea or as large as an eggplant, in hues of cream, yellow, orange and green. Their pungency ranges from sweet to flaming hot. All peppers contain capsaicin. Their heat is determined by the amount of capsaicin they contain and is measured in HU = Heat Units on a scale from 0 HU – 200,000+ HU. Ghost pepper is the hottest chili pepper; it is extremely hot and usually comes with a warning!

#### Chipotle

When fresh jalapenos are smoke-dried, the resulting withered peppers, with a hot smoky flavor are called chipotle.

## Paprika

Paprika, also from the capsicum family, is the mildest of peppers. Today, the best paprika comes from Hungary. Paprika adds a beautiful color to dishes with a mild flavor and a whole lot of vitamin C.

## Körözött

Körözött is a delicious Hungarian dish, a dip for vegetables, fruits, and chips, or as a spread on bread and crackers. Combine all ingredients with a fork or food processor:

- 1 tsp mustard
- ¼ green onions or chives, snipped
- 1-2 cloves of garlic, minced
- ¼ tsp caraway ground (optional)
- 28 oz softened cream, cottage or goat cheese
- Enough paprika to taste and create a rich color
- Place a slice of anchovy on top of this dish

## Five Spice Blend

Five Spice blend is used throughout China and Vietnam to flavor many dishes. Combine the following ingredients in a spice grinder and grind to a powder:

- 6 star anise pods
- 1 tbsp fennel seeds
- 1 tbsp szechuan pepper
- 2 tsp cloves
- One 2-inch cinnamon stick, broken up

## Seven Spice Seasoning *(Shichimi Togarashi)*

Use this spice blend in soups, pasta, vegetables and grilled meats. Combine all ingredients in a spice grinder or food processor and grind coarsely:

- 1 tbsp white sesame seeds
- 1 tbsp szechuan pepper
- 1 tbsp minced tangerine zest
- One 2-inch square Japanese seaweed (Nori) finely chopped
- 1 tsp ground cayenne
- 1 tsp poppy seeds
- 1 tsp black sesame seeds

## Salsa – Quick, Delicious, Easy

- 2 Anaheim chilies
- 2 red peppers
- 2 yellow peppers
- 1 onion with skin on
- 6 garlic cloves
- 1 bunch fresh cilantro
- ¼ cup water
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ fresh limes juice
- More garlic

Grill or roast chilies, peppers, onion and garlic until blackened on a cast iron skillet. Remove from grill, stovetop or oven, let cool, and peel away skins. In a blender, combine all ingredients and puree until smooth. Stir in lime juice; add a little more garlic, minced, to your taste. Pour over grilled vegetables, or use as a dip with fresh vegetables or corn chips.

## Harissa

This spice blend is popular all over Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Prepare Harissa whenever an intensely fiery hot sauce is in demand.

- 4 large dried chili peppers, seeded
- 1 tsp mint, dried
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp coriander seeds
- 1 tbsp caraway seeds
- 8 garlic cloves
- 1 tsp cumin seeds

Soak chilies and mint in 1/3 cup of hot water for 30 minutes, then transfer to a food processor. Add remaining ingredients and blend to a smooth paste.

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