

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Using Herbs and Spices to Flavor Foods: Enhancing Flavor and Appeal

Nutrition and Meal Management

Purpose: This handout provides four ways to use herbs and spices to enhance the flavor and appeal to food.

Herbs are green leaves or stems of plants, such as annuals, shrubs, trees, and grasses. Spices are parts of a plant that are fragrant, such as the bark, roots, seeds, or the fruit. When used to prepare foods, they enhance the flavor and appeal of foods without adding sugar or sodium. They not only add unique flavors but contribute color and variety as well. Herbs and spices are low in calories, sodium, and fat, and they have no cholesterol. Knowing some user-friendly ways to use them can help to create nutritious meals and snacks for those in your care.

Add Savory Flavor

A variety of herbs and spices add savory flavors that can be used to replace or reduce salt in recipes. Some examples of savory herbs and spices include chives, basil, oregano, garlic, onion powder, tarragon, and paprika.

Adding seasoning such as garlic powder, paprika, and thyme to a beef stew recipe will provide flavor without needing as much salt/sodium. Another example is using sage, rosemary, and thyme to add flavor to chicken or turkey. Using the same kinds of seasonings on vegetables also adds flavor.

Reduce Sugar

Many herbs and spices have a sweet flavor that can be used to reduce the amount of sugar needed in recipes. Some examples of sweet herbs and spices include cinnamon, cardamom, allspice, anise, and mint. While some of these seasonings are not naturally sweet, they help create a combination that adds the right amount of flavor without sugar.

Consider a recipe such as baked pears with a spiced oatmeal crisp topping. Nutmeg and cinnamon add to the sweet flavor of this dish without adding additional sugar.

Add Color

Certain herbs and spices have a strong influence on the color of food. These include fresh basil, parsley, cilantro, chili powder, paprika, curry, and turmeric.

Rice is a common dish that can easily take on color from various herbs and spices. Brown rice can be prepared with fresh dill, green onion, cilantro, and parsley for a green appearance. The same brown rice could use chili powder and paprika for a red appearance. If turmeric or curry is used, the rice will have a bright yellow appearance.

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Add Strong, Zesty Flavor

Many herbs and spices have a strong, zesty flavor, such as red pepper, black pepper, mustard, curry, and chili powder.

A savory recipe for brown rice pilaf that uses garlic, salt, pepper, celery salt, and thyme for flavor has a warm, comforting appeal. The same brown rice can be used in a recipe for Spanish rice, which would be seasoned with salt, pepper, cumin, chili powder, paprika, oregano, garlic powder, and cinnamon resulting in a zesty, spicy taste. Using herbs and spices is a wonderful way to keep menus interesting with a variety of flavors and colors. They can be used in place of or reducing salt and sugar in recipes, they can also add color and zesty flavors. Herbs and spices play an important role in keeping foods interesting and tasty.

References

- University of Delaware, Cooperative Extension. (n.d.). *Using herbs and spices*. <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/12944>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service. (2002, February 12). *Herbs can spice up your antioxidant protection*. <https://www.ars.usda.gov/news-events/news/research-news/2002/herbs-can-spice-up-your-antioxidant-protection/>

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