

FONDFOLK

THE SILK ROAD PANTRY

*Choosing spices and making
18 classic blends*



SAMPLE EDITION

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Working with Heat and Aroma



Heat changes a spice's character; it does not simply make every spice better. A recipe may call for dry toasting, brief cooking in fat, a long infusion or a fresh addition near the end. Follow that choice before adding extra steps. Untoasted spices can supply a clear, bright flavour, while toasted ones bring a more roasted character. A blend for baking may go straight into the flour. Not every ingredient needs to be toasted, and not every toasted ingredient needs a second cooking in oil.

For dry toasting, use a clean, dry frying pan with enough room for one layer. Start over medium-low heat and move the spices often. With a small batch of cumin or coriander seeds, begin checking within the first minute; aroma and gentle colour change matter more than a fixed stopwatch. Remove them before smoking or dark scorching develops. Tip them onto a cool plate immediately, because the emptying pan retains heat. Toast ingredients separately when their sizes or rates of browning differ.

Let toasted spices cool before grinding or closing them in a jar. Use a mortar for small quantities and coarse textures, or a suitable electric spice grinder for a finer powder. Follow its capacity limits and use short pulses rather than one prolonged run. Reserve a grinder for spices if coffee flavour would be unwelcome. Let airborne powder settle before opening the lid, particularly with chillies, then transfer it with a dry spoon. Clean the equipment as its manufacturer directs and dry it completely before the next batch.

Blooming means briefly cooking spices in fat so their flavour becomes part of the dish's foundation or finishing seasoning. Have the next ingredient ready before starting. Warm the recipe's oil or ghee until hot but not smoking, add the specified spices and stir. Ground spices can become fragrant within roughly 20–30 seconds and can burn quickly; the actual window depends on the pan and heat. Add the recipe's prepared aromatics or liquid as directed to continue cooking, taking care with splashing. Acrid, blackened spices should be replaced, not disguised.

The stage of addition matters as much as the amount. Whole spices can perfume cooking liquid gradually; ground spices distribute more evenly through sauces and mixtures. A little seasoning near the end may provide an aroma that a long simmer would soften. These are different effects, so adding a second dose should be deliberate rather than automatic. Remove hard whole spices such as cinnamon sticks and whole cloves before service when the recipe calls for an infusion, or warn diners clearly when they remain in a shared dish.

Keep a short cooking note: spice, form, amount, heating method and stage of addition. This makes it easier to repeat a balanced result or understand why another version tasted harsher. Use level measuring spoons; in this book a teaspoon is 5 ml and a tablespoon is 15 ml. Where a weight is given, use the weight. Pan timings are estimates and toasting cues are culinary cues: a fragrant aroma does not establish that a spice has undergone a validated food-safety treatment.

Pepper and coriander

P01 Black, White and Green Pepper

Black, white and green peppercorns come from the same climbing plant, *Piper nigrum*. Harvesting and processing create the differences. Black pepper retains its outer fruit layer, which darkens during drying. White pepper has that layer removed. Green pepper is harvested immature and preserved or dried to retain its character.

Black pepper offers a rounded, woody fragrance and a lingering bite. White pepper can taste earthier, sometimes with a distinctly fermented note; it is not simply invisible black pepper. Green peppercorns have a fresher, greener character. Brined examples also contribute salt, and sometimes acidity, so taste the sauce before seasoning further.

Buy whole black or white peppercorns when you have a mill. Look for intact, dry berries and a clear aroma when a few are crushed. A named origin or grade can help you compare purchases, but neither large size nor a prestigious name guarantees the flavour you prefer. Check that ground pepper smells aromatic rather than merely dusty.

Grind finely for a smooth cream sauce or mash; crush coarsely for steak au poivre. Whole peppercorns suit stock that will be strained. Add some ground pepper during cooking for an integrated flavour, then a little near serving for a brighter aroma. Green peppercorns are particularly useful in cream sauces for pork or poultry.

Keep dried pepper tightly sealed away from light, heat and steam. Store opened brined peppercorns as their label directs, usually refrigerated; their storage requirements differ from those of dried pepper.

P02 Coriander Seed

Coriander seed is the dried fruit of *Coriandrum sativum*, the plant that also supplies the leafy herb called coriander or cilantro. The two ingredients have different jobs. The seed brings a gentle citrus fragrance with warm, nutty undertones; the leaf tastes fresh and green. One does not replace the other in a classic recipe.

Seeds may be round or more elongated, depending on the variety. Commercial lots described as Indian often emphasise citrus, while Moroccan types may seem rounder and sweeter. Treat these descriptions as useful expectations, not fixed rules. Smell a crushed sample when possible and choose a seller who identifies the origin and packing information.

Whole seeds are useful for infusions and mixtures that will be strained. For a smooth soup or sauce, grind them well: their husks can remain noticeable if only roughly crushed. Brief dry toasting gives a warmer impression. Keep the seeds moving over moderate heat and stop when fragrant, before they turn dark; cool before grinding.

Use ground coriander with onions early in a lentil soup, chickpea stew or gently spiced braise. Give it a short turn in the cooking fat, then add liquid before it catches. Coriander works comfortably beside cumin, black pepper and ginger; it also suits carrots, citrus peel and lamb without contributing much heat.

Keep whole seeds sealed in a cool cupboard. Grind modest amounts and label the jar with the grinding date; replace a flat-smelling powder rather than adding spoonful after spoonful.

Garam Masala

Approximately 40 g; small losses in the grinder are possible | Prep 12 min | Cook 5 min

Total time: About 35–40 minutes, including approximately 20 minutes for the toasted seeds to cool; allow longer if either the seeds or finished powder remain warm.

About 20 minutes cooling

Equipment: Scale accurate to 0.1 g; Small dry frying pan; Heatproof plate; Dry spice grinder; Bowl and dry spoon; Clean, dry 120 ml jar

Garam masala changes from kitchen to kitchen. This everyday house version balances coriander and cumin with green cardamom, pepper and warm sweet spices. It contains neither chilli nor turmeric. Use a modest amount toward the end of cooking, where its freshly ground fragrance remains distinct.

Ingredients

16 g coriander seeds
 10 g cumin seeds
 4 g green cardamom seeds, weighed after discarding the pods
 4 g black peppercorns
 1.5 g whole cloves
 4 g ground Ceylon cinnamon
 0.5 g finely grated nutmeg

Method

1. Measure the ingredients separately. Discard the cardamom husks before weighing the seeds; 4 g of whole pods would give a different balance.
2. Warm the coriander in the dry pan over low heat, stirring, for about 2–3 minutes until fragrant. Tip onto the plate. Warm the cumin separately for 1–2 minutes, stirring; stop before either spice darkens markedly.
3. Spread the warmed seeds on the plate and cool completely, about 20 minutes. Do not grind them while warm or seal them in a jar to cool.
4. Grind the cooled seeds with the cardamom seeds, peppercorns and cloves in short bursts. Let airborne powder settle before opening. Pause if the grinder becomes warm.
5. Transfer to the bowl and thoroughly stir in the cinnamon and nutmeg. If the blend has warmed during grinding, let it return to room temperature before closing it in the labelled jar.

Cooking note. No salt is added. Light warming develops flavour; it is not a validated pathogen-reduction step. Keep the cardamom seeds measured separately so a change of pod size does not quietly alter the mixture.

Keeping and serving. Store cool, dry and dark in the closed jar. Aim to finish within 4–6 weeks for aroma, following shorter package instructions when relevant. This window does not establish microbiological safety. Use a clean, dry spoon.

Serve with. Begin with 1 g for 500 ml dal or curry sauce, stirring it through for the final 3–5 minutes of cooking. For 500 g cooked vegetables, begin with 1.5 g and heat through with a little cooking liquid.

Za'atar

About 40 g | Prep 10 min | Cook 0 min

Total time: About 10 minutes with the purchased toasted sesame specified; no further heating is required.

Equipment: Scale accurate to 0.1 g; Small bowl; Mortar or the back of a spoon; Clean, completely dry airtight jar

Za'atar names both an aromatic herb and a family of Levantine seasoning blends. This pantry version uses dried thyme and oregano with sumac and sesame; its flavour is not identical to mixtures made with the regional za'atar herb. Keep it leafy and coarse.

Ingredients

18 g commercially toasted, ready-to-eat white sesame seeds

12 g ground culinary sumac without added salt

6 g dried thyme leaves, woody stems removed

3 g dried oregano leaves

1 g fine salt

Method

1. Remove tough herb stems before weighing. Choose culinary sumac with a clearly tart aroma and no added salt; this formula includes its own measured amount.
2. Rub the herbs between clean, dry fingers or crush briefly in the mortar, leaving small flakes. Powdering them would lose texture and encourage settling in the jar.
3. Combine the crushed herbs, sumac and salt in the bowl. Stir from the bottom until the red sumac is evenly scattered through the leaves. Add the toasted sesame and fold it through without crushing the seeds.
4. Transfer to the completely dry jar and label with the date and the word sesame. This method uses purchased toasted sesame and needs no further heating. If any ingredient was warmed separately, let it cool fully before packing.
5. Stir before each use, lifting from the bottom so every portion contains herbs, sumac and sesame. Spoon out only what is needed; keep the bulk mixture dry.

Cooking note. Contains sesame. The blend already includes a little salt. Do not fry it hard in a dry pan: the small herb flakes and sesame can burn before the food cooks.

Keeping and serving. Keep airtight in a cool, dark, dry place and aim to use within 1 month for freshness. Do not store the jar with added oil or liquid, and discard any portion contaminated by a damp serving spoon.

Serve with. For 250 g labneh or thick plain yogurt, start with 4 g sprinkled over the top just before serving. For two flatbreads, mix 6 g with 15 ml olive oil in a separate bowl, spread thinly and bake according to the bread recipe.

Pantry Audit

Audit date: _____ Next review: _____

List what you own before shopping. For the action column, use keep, use soon, replace or do not rebuy. Record the opening date when known; an unknown date is a reason to review the jar, not an automatic safety verdict. Follow the book’s handling guidance when deciding what to discard.

Spice and form	Opened	Amount left	Next dish	Action

Buy now	Wait until a dish needs it

Blend Batch Log

Blend name: _____ Batch code: _____

Date made: _____ Final batch weight: _____ g

Recipe or version: _____ Salt included: yes / no

Use one sheet for each batch, continuing on another with the same batch code if necessary. Weigh ingredients separately when practical, identify their form and retain the supplier or lot details. Record any toasting or grinding before combining. These notes describe the batch; they do not establish a shelf life.

Ingredient	Form and lot	Weight g	Preparation