

# MEDIEVAL CULINARY HERBS & SPICES

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## Introduction

Herbs and spices were (as they are now) used to add to the flavor of dishes. They alleviate the boredom of same old thing (specifically dull grains and highly salted meat and fish in pre-refrigerator days). Generally speaking an herb is a fresh flavoring or one found locally and a spice is something that has to be imported (strict definitions really aren't important). Spicing to cover rotten meat is fallacy that got written and passed down without checking. Even now it's perpetuated. Spices were carefully stored and locked away in the medieval area. You could grind and mix spices yourself or buy prepped from the spicer or apothecary. Spices were exotic and expensive; they added a level of conspicuous consumption; remember surviving cookbooks are mainly royal. In royal households the head cook might have had to liaison with the Royal Physician on meal planning and herb/spice use (due to theories of the humors and the effects of herb/spices on the health of individuals).

For information on Humoral theory, I can do no better than Jadwiga's articles and Scully & Scully (see bibliography). Some authors think that because of travel and distance, spices were not fresh and sometimes adulterated, so probably not as pure and strong tasting as currently found. Salads were less interesting than "made" dishes but they were eaten and often included many herbs, not lettuce/vegetables. The Form of Cury herb salad recipe (Sass) has a basic dressing of oil, vinegar and salt.

Sometimes modern recreations/adaptations do weird substitutions. Try to read or translate the original recipe if possible. Many of the obscure spices that weren't available in the 1960s and 1970s when some of our cookbooks were translated are now available in the era of the Internet.

## Tools

Sieves	Woolen bags for straining	Forks (cooking, carving)
Knives	Graters	Spoons
Mortars & Pestles – could be stone, marble, wood; used to pound spices, nuts, herbs, garlic, chicken, fish		Measuring spoons & cups

## Measurements

Troy/apothecary weights (medieval)	Avoirdupois weights (modern American)
1 oz = 31.1g	1 oz = 28.3g
12 oz = 1 pound (373.2g)	16 oz = 1 pound (452.8g)

## Properties/uses of herbs & spices

- Culinary (taste, color)
  - Medicinal/humoral
  - Mystical/religious
  - Dyestuffs
- Spices enhance the four basic food flavors:
- Sweet
  - Salty
  - Sour
  - Bitter

## Test Sauce

### Galantine (from Form of Cury)

(Sass, King's Taste, p. 90)

Take crustes of brede, and grynde hem smale. Do thereto powdor of galyntyne, of canel, gyngynes and salt it. Temper it with vyngar and drawe it up thurgh a straynor and mess it forthe.

Served over fillets of pork, meat, fish, fowl.

### Recreation:

Breadcrumbs  
Galingale  
Cinnamon  
Ginger  
Salt  
Vinegar  
Pass thru sieve and serve.

## Spice list

**Anise seed** [*Pimpinella anisum*] – native to Western Anatolia, not sure when it hit Europe; used as comfits in Elizabethan era

**Black pepper** [*Piper nigrum*] – medieval folks knew black (with skins) and white (w/o skins); rose pepper is from a different plant

**Caraway** [*Carum carvi*] – related to cumin, became known in the Roman era

**Cardamom** [*Elettaria cardamomum*] – native to India and Sri Lanka; Arabs used it to flavor their coffee

**Cassia** [*Cinnamomum cassia*]/**Cinnamon** [*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*] – what we call “cinnamon” is really cassia (most cinnamon sold in US is cassia); in medieval english/french cassia was called “canel” which made cameline sauce; medieval folks would use this were ever they could afford

**Cloves** [*Syzygium aromaticum*] – chewed to freshen breath; used in sweets (didn’t have time to look up history of cloven fruit)

**Coriander** [*Coriandrum sativum*] – native to Greece/Mediterranean; popular since Greek & Roman times

**Cubeb** [*Piper cubeba*] – relative of black pepper; native to Java; imported to England in 13th c.

**Cumin** [*Cuminum cyminum*] – native to eastern Mediterranean & Near East; used in lots of recipes in Apicius (Roman cookbook)

**Dill seed**

**Fennel seed**

**Fenugreek** – native to SE Europe/West Asia

**Galangal/galingale** [greater, *Alpinia galanga*; lesser, *Alpinia officinarum*] – most galangal available in US is lesser galangal; this rhizome is related to ginger

**Ginger** [*Zingiber officinale*] – medieval folks probably never saw fresh ginger in Europe; it was shipped dried whole or in slices, or was preserved in sugar for shipping

**Grains of paradise** [*Aframomum melegueta*] – species of cardamom; native to Africa; known early to medieval europe (mentioned in 13<sup>th</sup> c. French *Roman de la Rose*)

**Juniper berries** – used in Roman cooking; unscrupulous vendors would cut expensive black pepper with cheap domestic juniper.

**Long pepper** [*Piper longum*] – native to northeastern India; reached Greece in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE; finding chile in the New World killed market for long pepper in 16<sup>th</sup> c. Europe; before chiles came it was the hottest spice in the medieval arsenal and folks wanted it for spiced wine, food, etc.; considered an antidote to hemlock

**Mace** [*Myristica fragrans*]/**Nutmeg** [*Myristica fragrans*] – mace is the bran or blade of the nut seed that produces the nutmeg; freshly ground nutmeg is highly preferable to any other kind.

**Mustard** [*Brassica nigra* and *Sinapis alba*] – ground in mills called mustard querns; served with vinegar over beef; period mustard sauce would not have been as yellow as our plain mustard as turmeric is added modernly to enhance the color

**Poppy seeds**

**Saffron** [*Crocus sativus*] – In period, turmeric would have been more expensive than saffron so they wouldn’t have used turmeric as a yellow/saffron substitute. In French medieval cooking the word “frangié” or fringed, was a term for the sprinkling of saffron on certain dishes to produce a speckled effect. Buying saffron by the ounce is more cost-effective than by the gram or partial gram. The best price I’ve found on the web so far is San Francisco Herb Co, with 1oz Mancha

(Spanish) saffron tin at \$30. <http://www.sfherb.com/>. There are approx 28gms in an ounce. \$30/28= \$1.07/gm! Compare that to the \$3-5/gm we've been paying in the Portland area or \$6/gm at Tony the Spice Guy. If stored properly the tins can retain quality for 3-5 years.

**Salt** – salt available would have been local mined salt (England and Ibiza both produced mined salt, probably in blocks which would be shaved for serving), the other desired salt was French sea salt. Medieval processing did not contain additives like iodine (human added additives) but might contain naturally occurring impurities; an affluent household would buy bay salt (a large grain salt with impurities) dissolve it back into brine and boil the brine over a fire until it crystallized to make a finer salt for serving (from Kurlansky), the recipe for this is found in Menagier de Paris; Salt was also used to cure meat & fish, tan leather, glaze pottery, make butter, and as a medicine on its own.

**Saunders/Sandalwood** [*Pterocarpus santalinus*] -- bloom first in warm water, turns rusty red; in warm vinegar/wine turns bright red; primarily used as a coloring agent

**Sugar** (brown, fine, etc.) – sugar cane [*Saccharum officinarum*] planted by Arabs in North Africa, probably cultivated from earlier Chinese sugarcane; Normans in Sicily were refining sugar by the 12th c.; Sugar Cane was brought from Persia to India, probably around 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> c. CE. By 10<sup>th</sup> c. it was grown in Sicily and Southern Spain. Medieval Europe bought sugar in loaves from India.

**Sumac** -- This ground reddish berry has a pleasant mélange of sour, sweet and bitter flavors. Added to yogurt for a dip, dusted on grilled fish or mixed in with rice, sumac will give a fruit and sour flavor similar to lemon. Sprinkle liberally on a bowl of hummus for authentic color and taste.

## Turmeric

## Herb list

<b>Basil</b>	<b>Bay/Laurel leaves</b> [ <i>Laurus nobilis</i> ] – present in Roman cooking (Apicius)	<b>Borage</b> – blue flowered plant with hairy leaves; tastes like cucumber; used in salads	<b>Chamomile</b> – aster flower; small daisy-like flowers; when dried used in herbal cures	<b>Chard</b>
<b>Chervil</b>	<b>Chives</b>	<b>Clary</b> (a sage) – cuts grease of fatty meats and fish	<b>Coriander</b> (green/fresh coriander = cilantro)	<b>Costmary</b>
<b>Dill</b> (fresh)	<b>Dittany</b> (a mint) – used in salads and as medicinal herb; purplish flowers	<b>Fennel</b> (fresh)	<b>Hyssop</b> (a mint) – bitter herb; blue flowered mint; leaves cut grease of meat and fish	<b>Lavendar</b>
<b>Laver</b> (seaweed) – an edible purple seaweed	<b>Lovage</b>	<b>Marjoram/Oregano</b> (a relative of Marjoram)	<b>Mint</b>	<b>Parsley</b>
<b>Purslane</b> – potherb or salad herb; pinkish fleshy stem	<b>Rocket/Arugala</b> – pungent salad herb	<b>Rosemary</b>	<b>Rue</b> – yellow leaves; bitter herb; used in salads and herbal cures	<b>Sage</b>
<b>Savory</b>	<b>Sorrel</b>	<b>Southernwood</b> – shrubby plant with yellowish flower and bitter tasting leaves; culinary and medicinal uses	<b>Spikenard</b> [ <i>Nardostachys jatamansi</i> ](valerian) – aromatic plant of northern India; used in subtleties	<b>Spinach</b>
<b>Tansy</b> – bitter herb; juice extract used in cakes	<b>Tarragon</b>	<b>Thyme</b>	<b>Vervain</b> – medicinal herb of the verbena family; slightly bitter	<b>Watercress</b>

## Other flavors common in medieval cooking

- Almonds (almond milk)
- Honey
- Rose water
- The Onion "Tribe": Chibol (an extinct onion, use Shallots or Scallions), Garlic, Leek, Porrect, Scallion, Shallot
- Bacon fat/lamb fat
- Olive oil
- Verjuice
- Butter (by culture)
- Orange water
- Vinegar
- Citrus
- Pomegranate
- Wine

## New world favorites

- Vanilla
- Chocolate
- Chili/Chiles (capsicum, including paprika)
- Allspice

## Shopping Resources:

Foodbooks.com

Cookbook vendor, medieval section.

<http://www.foodbooks.com/medieval.htm>

Francesco Sirene, Spicer

SCA spice vendor in Canada.

<http://www.silk.net/sirene/>

Sells grains of paradise \*in the husk\* and they are a lot of work to remove. Get the decorticated (sans husk) if you can.

Francesco is in British Columbia so there's the "Canadian discount" should you see it that way. His "Spice chest" page with lists spice documentation from cookbooks is most excellent.

Indian Food World (bulk spices: cumin, coriander, cinnamon, etc.)

10195 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy., Beaverton, OR 97005 (near Western Ave.)

(503) 350-3966

Mountain Rose Herbs

P.O. Box 50220, Eugene, OR 97405

(800) 879-3337

<http://www.mountainroseherbs.com>

Oregon Spice Company Inc

1630 Se Rhine, Portland, OR 97202-2846 (hours are 8am-430pm, M-F)

(503) 238-0664

They carry grains of paradise and will do mail order.

<http://www.oregonspice.com/>

Poison Pen Press: Cookery section

SCA Book vendor's cooking section.

<http://www.poisonpenpress.com/cookery.html>

Srider's India Imports

11945 SW Pacific Hwy, Suite 216, Tigard, OR (corner of Hall & 99W in the Safeway/JoAnn's center)

(503) 620-8665

World Spice Merchants

SCA-friendly spice merchant in Seattle. Owner is affectionately called "Tony the Spice Guy" (Tony Hill).

They stocks cubebs, long pepper, and grains of paradise. Can email order. Tell them you're SCA.

1509 Western Ave., Seattle, WA 98101-1521

(206) 682-7274

<http://www.worldspice.com/>

## Research Resources:

Beebe, Ruth Anne. Sallets, Humbles & Shrewsbury Cakes: a collection of Elizabethan recipes adapted for the modern kitchen. Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1976.

Black, Maggie. Food and Cooking in medieval Britain, history and recipes. [London]: English Heritage, 2003.

Black, Maggie. The Medieval Cookbook. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997.

Dalby, Andrew. Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Discussion of sugar, sugar processing, sugar availability, cooking with, etc.  
<http://www.florilegium.org/files/FOOD-SWEETS/sugar-msg.html>

Gernot Katzer's Spice Pages

An overview on Herbs and Spices, history, origin, what it looks like, etc. (pictures included, this is fabulous!)  
<http://www-ang.kfunigraz.ac.at/~katzer/engl/>

Henisch, Bridget. Fast and Feast: food in medieval society. University Park, PA : Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

Hieatt, Constance B. Brenda Hosington and Sharon Butler. Pleyn delit: medieval cookery for modern cooks. (2nd ed.)  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

History of Vinegar, <http://www.zingermans.com/Article.pasp?ArticleID=article32>

Jadwiga Zajaczkowa's Herbalism webpage (herbs, spices, etc.) [mka Jennifer A. Heise]  
I thought I was the spice nut til I saw her pages. Highly recommended. See booklists and other resources.  
<http://www.lehigh.edu/%7Ejahn/herbs/herbs.html>

Ibid:

A selection of herbs used in medieval times by Jadwiga Zajaczkowa  
<http://www.lehigh.edu/%7Ejahn/herbs/herbhandout.htm>

“Spices from the East” by Jadwiga Zajaczkowa (Jennifer A. Heise), c2001  
good discussions of the humors  
<http://www.lehigh.edu/%7Ejahn/herbs/Easternspice.html>

Herbs and Spices of the Middle Ages: A booklist by Jadwiga Zajaczkowa  
<http://www.lehigh.edu/%7Ejahn/herbs/herbbooks.html>

Kräuter und Heilpflanzen, compiled by Lyn M. Parkinson

This table contains plants that are or have been used for medical purposes, as well as those for cookery. Some may no longer be considered safe to use. It is for purposes of translation, and is not an invitation to cook with unfamiliar plants without further research into their uses and liabilities.

<http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Herbchart.html>

Kurlansky, Mark. Salt: A World History. New York: Walker & Co., 2002.

Lorwin, Madge. Dining with William Shakespeare. New York: Atheneum, 1976.

Prescott, James (translator). Le Viandier de Taillevent. Eugene, OR: Alfarhaugr Publishing Society, 1989.

Renfrow, Cindy and Elise Fleming [writing as Singiefu Waerfaest and Alys Katharine]. “The Colorful Cook” The Compleat Anachronist #109. Milpitas, CA: The Society of Creative Anachronism, 2000.

Ruperto de Nola's "*Libre del Coch*" (an English translation) by Lady Brigid ni Chiarain.

<http://www.florilegium.org/files/FOOD-MANUSCRIPTS/Guisados1-art.html>  
<http://www.florilegium.org/files/FOOD-MANUSCRIPTS/Guisados2-art.html>

- Santich, Barbara. The Original Mediterranean Cuisine: medieval recipes for today. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1995.
- Sass, Lorna. To the King's Taste. [New York]: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975.
- Spice Encyclopedia. <http://www.spiceadvice.com/encyclopedia/index.html>
- Sully, D. Eleanor and Terence Scully. Early French Cookery: sources, history, original recipes and modern adaptations. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002.
- A Summer Salad by Baroness Jehanne de Huguenin, <http://users.iafrica.com/m/me/melisant/cook/salad.htm>
- Tannahill, Reay. Food in History. New York, Stein and Day, 1973.
- Troy, Phillip W. (writing as Gideanus Tacitus Adamatius) "On Spices & Substitutions" in Tournaments Illuminated, Issue 93 Winter A.S. XXIV (1989)
- Wheaton, Barbara K. Savoring the Past: the French kitchen and table from 1300 to 1789. New York: Scribner, 1996.

### **Further Reading:**

- Craze, Richard. The Spice Companion: the culinary, cosmetic, and medicinal uses of spices. Allentown, PA: People's Medical Society, 1997.
- Flandrin, Jean-Louis, "Seasoning, Cooking and Dietetics in the Late Middle Ages," In Food: a culinary history from antiquity to the present. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p.313-327.
- Forme of Cury, online version: <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/foc/>
- Garland, Sarah. The complete book of Herbs and Spices: an illustrated guide to growing and using culinary, aromatic, cosmetic and medicinal plants. Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest, 1993.
- Goodman of Paris (Le Managier de Paris), trans. Eileen Powers, ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928.
- Le Menagier de Paris. online version of an 1844 English translation:  
<http://www.best.com/~ddfr/Medieval/Cookbooks/Menagier/Menagier.html>
- McGee, Harold. On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen. New York: Macmillan, 1988.
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- Swahn, J.O. The Lore of Spices: Their history, nature and uses around the world. New York: Crescent Books, 1991.
- Wilson, C. Anne. Food and drink in Britain : from the Stone Age to the 19th century. Chicago : Academy Chicago Publishers, 1991.