

HERBS AND SPICES PART 2: SPICES

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This is the second of a two-part series on herbs and spices. Herbs and spices are plants or plant parts used as flavor enhancers in food. As before, what follows is a listing of commonly used spices. The list is in alphabetical order by family. Each entry contains a short description of their use and growth characteristics. Not all have appeared on stamps. For those that have, I have chosen the stamps in the list when a single motif is dominant. Occasionally, there are two different species on one stamp.

Illicium verum**Illiciaceae****Star Anise**

[Note: Do not confuse this with anise (*Pimpinella anisum*). A design error on the Montserrat and Singapore stamps shows the seedpod of *Illicium* with the vegetative parts of *Pimpinella*.]

Use: Fruit and seeds used in Chinese, Indian Indonesian, and Malay cooking, in meat dishes and curries, especially in the Indian spice *garam masala*. For flavoring pastries in Scandinavia and Russia. Also in liqueurs. The compound anethole gives flavor to both kinds of anise.

Growth characteristics: Evergreen tree indigenous to Southeast Asia, only found in cultivation. Grows to 10 meters (m).



Malaysia 1348 (2011) [illus]; Montserrat 1262a (2011) [design error]; Singapore 1501 (2011) [illus] [design error]; Sweden 2507a (2005); North Viet Nam 191 (1962)

Cinnamomum verum**Lauraceae****Cinnamon**

Use: Ground bark used to flavor baked goods and desserts, especially in the U.S., and to flavor meat and stews in the Middle East. Also in pickles and soups. Popular in ancient Egypt and Rome. Gives off sweet aroma. Hot to taste.

Growth characteristics: Evergreen tree cultivated in tropical countries. Originally from Sri Lanka.

Comoro Islands 816D, 816E (1997), 964 (2001); Fiji 945 (2002); France-Mayotte 243a (2008); India 2321b (2009) [illus]; Laos 1845 (2011); Malaysia 1347 (2011) [illus]; St Lucia 963 (1990); St Vincent 3749f (2011); Tanzania 2225d (2008) [illus]

***Myristica fragrans*****Myristicaceae****Nutmeg, Mace**

Use: Nutmeg made from ground seed. Mace made from reddish aril surrounding seed. Used in savory dishes in a number of cuisines, e.g., potato dishes, omelets, and soufflés. Imparts flavor to *béchamel* sauce in French cuisine. Used in mulled cider and eggnog. Nutmeg has a warm, spicy sweet flavor. Mace is described as having a more delicate flavor.

Growth characteristics: Indigenous to Southeast Asia, widely grown in the Caribbean. Evergreen tree to 20m.

Comoro Is. 816G (1997), 963 (2001); Fiji 943 (2002); France-Mayotte 243b (2008); Grenada 1650 (1988), 2460 (1995); Mauritius 799 (1995); St Vincent 831 (1985); Seychelles 424 (1978); Singapore 1350 (2008) [illus]; Tanzania 2518 (2008) [illus]



***Pimenta dioica* Myrtaceae Allspice, Pimento**

Use: Dried unripe berries. Flavor combination of cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg. In meat dishes in Middle Eastern and Caribbean, sausages, pickles. In *mole* in Mexican cooking and in Scandinavian cuisine. In liqueurs Benedictine and Chartreuse.

Growth characteristics: Indigenous to Central America and Caribbean. Evergreen shrub or small tree.

Jamaica 343 (1972) [illus]

***Syzygium aromaticum* Myrtaceae Clove**

Use: Dried flower buds. African, Asian, and Middle Eastern cooking use cloves in meat dishes, curries, and marinades. Often used in sweet dishes with fruit. In mulled wines. Warm, sweet aromatic flavor.

Growth characteristics: Evergreen tree to 10m. Indigenous to Indonesia.

India 2321d (2009) [illus]; Madagascar 298 (1957); Mauritius 801 (1995); St Vincent 1676 (1992); Tanzania 238 (1984), 589C (1990), 2225 (2003), 2358 (2005), 2429 (2006) [illus], 2519, 2520 (2008); Zanzibar 249, 250 (1957), 264-4 (1961), 314 (1964) 336, 343 (1966)

***Vanilla planifolia* Orchidaceae Vanilla**

Use: Whole seedpod, powdered pod, or extract. Major use is in ice cream and in other desserts to enhance flavorings like chocolate or caramel. Flavor is described as “pure, spicy, and delicate” with a complex floral aroma.

Growth characteristics: Climbing stems up to 10m. From tropical America, originally cultivated by Pre-Colombian Mesoamericans.

Antigua 2348c (2000); Comoros 80 (1969), 971 (2003); Fiji 944 (2002); France-Mayotte 130 (1999); French Polynesia 872 (2004); Gambia 2462a (2001); Honduras 1124, C1243 (2002); Madagascar 299 (1957); Malagasy 840 (1988); Mexico C633 (1980); New Caledonia 1028 (2007) [illus]; St Vincent 1371 (1990), 2775c (2000), 3571c (2007); Seychelles 199 (1962), 391 (1978); Tanzania 2150 (2000), 2318c (2004) 2522b (2008) [illus]; Turks & Caicos 1119 (1995)

***Papaver somniferum* Papaveraceae Poppy Seeds**

Use: Ripe seeds used in baked goods and pastries in a number of cuisines. Also as garnish or in candies.

Growth characteristics: Believed origin in southwest Asia. Cultivated as crops, to 1.5m. Same plant as opium poppy, but seeds contain no opioids.

Afghanistan 1396-98A (2003) [illus]; Egypt 1887 (2004); North Korea (1974); Laos 1481 (2000); Montserrat 1279b (2011); Palestine Authority 54 (1996); Monaco 1393 (1983); Myanmar 323 (1995); Pakistan 679 (1987); Syria 1117 (1987)



Sesamum indicum**Pedaliaceae****Sesame**

Use: Used in breads and baked goods, in U.S. for hamburger buns. Seeds and oil used in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, and Middle Eastern cuisines (where it is used in *hummus* and *tahini*). Provides a nutty taste and crunch to foods.

Growth characteristics: Annual plant up to 1m. Originated in East Africa or India. One of earliest cultivated plants, with records dating back 5000 years.

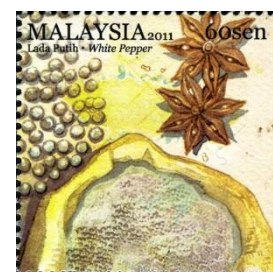
Sierra Leone 231 (1963); Somalia 253 (1961) [illus]; Surinam 1005 (1995) [illus]; Thailand 1844 (1998); Uganda 1209 (1993)

***Piper nigrum*****Piperaceae****Pepper**

Use: Ripe or unripe fruits are harvested. Black pepper is made from sun-dried unripe fruit. White pepper is made from ripe fruit with skins removed. Immature fruits give green pepper. Original hot taste for Indian food. Used for flavoring many savory foods. White pepper is used in French and Chinese cuisines.

Growth characteristics: Flowering vine up to 10m grown on trellises. Native to south India. Cultivated for 3000 years, used for 9000 years.

Comoro Is. 816A, 816H (1997), 947 (1999?); Fiji 942 (2002); Gabon 373 (1976); Gambia 2410f (2001); India 2321a (2009) [illus]; Madagascar 313 (1957); Malaysia 1350i,j (2011); [illus]; Malaysian States [e.g., Johore 193 (1986)]; St Vincent 3149e (2011); Sarawak 190 (1950); Singapore 1347,1351 (2008); St Thomas & Prince 1290 (1996); St Vincent 3749e (2011); Tanzania 2522e (2008) [illus]; Thailand 1996 (2001); Wallis & Futuna 473 (1995)

***Alpinia galangal*****Zingiberaceae****Galangal**

Use: Chopped rhizome used in Asian, especially Thai cuisines. Stronger taste than ginger.

Growth characteristics: Perennial herb to 2m indigenous to tropical Asia.

Not illustrated

Curcuma longa**Zingiberaceae****Turmeric**

Use: Powdered roots used in curry powders throughout Asia. Occasionally in sweet dishes like Indian *Sfouf*. Also used as coloring agent. Warm and bitter flavor.



Growth characteristics: Leafy stemless plant from South or Southeast Asia, grows to 1m.

France-Mayotte 243c (2008) [illus]; India 1641 (1997), 2321e (2009); Laos 153 (1967); Malaysia 1350c,d (2011) [illus]; Philippines 2132 (1992); St Vincent 3749d (2011); Singapore 1503 (2011); Tanzania 2523 (2008)

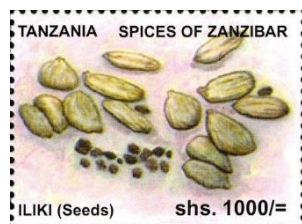


***Elettaria cardamomum* Zingiberaceae Cardamom**

Use: Ripe fruits and seeds, used whole or ground to flavor Indian curries and drinks such as Arabian coffee. Scandinavian cuisine uses it in a variety of foods including mulled wines and stewed fruit.

Growth characteristics: Perennial herb, native to India, grows 2–4m. Cultivated under shade trees.

Cambodia 109 (1962); India 2321c (2009) [illus]; Malaysia 1349 (2011) [illus]; Mauritius 802 (1995); Tanzania 2521 [illus], 2522a (2008) [illus]

***Zingiber officinale* Zingiberaceae Ginger**

Use: Rhizomes are used fresh, dried, or powdered in Asian in meat dishes, soups, fish, curries, and stir-fries. In other parts of the world, used in confectionery and to flavor drinks. Pungent, aromatic spice.

Growth characteristics: Perennial herb to 1.2m, thought to be indigenous to northeast India or China, but not found in the wild.

Ethiopia 1144 (1986); France-Mayotte 243d (2008) [illus]; St Lucia 1184 (2003); St Vincent 832 (1985); Tanzania 2522c (2008) [illus]

**References:**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spice>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_culinary_herbs_and_spices

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