



Slow Food[®] Hong Kong

Common Chinese Herbs & Spices List



Cumin 孜然



- What we eat: the seed of the *cuminum cyminum* plant
- It comes in brown, black (nigella), green white varieties
- Can be described as woody, earthy, herbal, spicy
- India produces and consumes the largest quantity of cumin (60%) per year, followed by China
- Cumin is a digestive aide and an appetite stimulant
- Cumin first arrived in China via the Silk Road 1,000 years ago and was first used by the Uyghur people; in fact, the Chinese name, ziran, is adapted from the Uyghur word, zire
- Today, Xinjiang Province still produces most of China's cumin and the spice is most commonly associated with the province's famous lamb skewers
- Cumin is used mostly in Northern regional cuisine, but there are also dishes from Central China such as Hunanese Cumin Beef



Peppercorn 胡椒



- What we eat: the dried berries of the *piper nigrum* or Black Pepper flowering vine plant
- It comes in a variety of colours based on how it's harvested and prepared: black, white, green, red, pink
- In China, it's called Hujiao or “foreign pepper” and its history dates back to the 3rd century
- Historically used as medicine as well as seasoning, it's thought to help cure constipation, insomnia, toothaches
- Chinese cuisine uses ground white pepper; it's included in many soups, marinades and stir fries, most famously it's what adds spice to a hot and sour soup
- And did you know, the Sichuan Peppercorn which is native to China, is NOT in fact a peppercorn. It is the dried berries of the prickly ash tree, an entirely different plant



Star Anise 八角



- What we eat: the dried fruit of the Asian evergreen tree, *illicium verum*
- Star shaped, typically with 6-8 points
- Native to China, Vietnam
- It is considered a digestive aide and reduces bloating
- Rich in antioxidants, vitamins A and C
- Commonly used whole in soups, stocks and braises, but when ground up, it is an ingredient in five spice powder mix or garam masala
- Recipes include: Lanzhou beef noodle soup, braised oxtail, soy sauce chicken



Cloves 丁香



- What we eat: the flower buds of an evergreen tree, *syzygium aromaticum*
- Strong, pungent and sweet aroma
- Native to the Maluku Islands of Indonesia; Indonesia remains the biggest producer and consumer
- It is said to be a digestive aide, can protect the liver and boost the immune system
- It is also used in oil form and is thought to be effective as a pain reliever and an insect repellent
- Clove is a versatile spice and is used to cook curries, braises as well as added to drinks and sweets
- In China, it is one of the ingredients in five-spice powder



Sesame 芝麻



- What we eat: the seeds of the flowering plant, *sesamum indicum*, but more commonly the oil that is extracted
- Rich, nutty aroma and flavor
- Japan and China are the biggest importers
- In Chinese cuisine, sesame oil is commonly used in cooking and frying but the seed form is a popular ingredient for sweets and desserts
- Recipes: Jin Dueti/Fried Sesame Balls, Black Sesame Soup



Cassia/Cinnamon 桂皮/肉桂



- What we eat: the inner bark of evergreen trees, *cinnamomum cassia* or *cinnamomum verum*, both powdered and in whole (stick) form
- Cassia or Chinese cinnamon originated in Southern China, while cinnamon is native to India, Sri Lanka
- Thought to have anti-inflammatory and anti-viral properties, some studies show it can help manage blood sugar and lower blood pressure
- Strong, sweet scent, warm, woody and vanilla-like
- Most commonly used in the preparation of sweets or in drinks but also for flavouring savory dishes



Ginger/Galangal/Turmeric 薑/高良薑/薑黃



- What we eat: the root of a flowering plant
- Ginger is the most aromatic of the three and the most spicy, Galangal is mildly citrusy and fresh, Turmeric is the least aromatic, mildly bitter and earthy
- Ginger, Galangal originated from Southeast Asia, and Turmeric from India
- Hong Kong produces local turmeric
- Ginger is considered a digestive aide, used to fight colds and boost immunity. Turmeric is said to have anti-inflammatory properties and is also used as a natural dye
- Chinese cooking commonly uses ginger, while galangal is found mostly in Southeast Asian dishes, and turmeric is heavily used in India



Fennel 茴香



- What we eat: the whole bulb, leaves or dried fruit of the flowering Fennel plant, *foeniculum vulgare*
- Fennel is thought to have originated in the Mediterranean but it is grown around the world
- Fennel is said to be a diuretic and thought to help lower blood pressure
- In Chinese cuisine, it is most commonly used in spice form, as one of the ingredients in five-spice powder but the vegetable can be found in meat dumplings



Tangerine Peel/Chenpi 陳皮



- What we eat: dried skin of the tangerine fruit
- Citrus, Wood and Medicinal fragrances depending on how long the peel has been aged
- The best chenpi is from Xinhui, Guangdong province
- The use of chen pi dates back to the Song dynasty
- In TCM, it is thought to regulate chi, fortifies the liver and eliminates dampness
- Chenpi is used in cooking various Chinese dishes, mixed in tong sui desserts or brewed as an herbal tea
- Recipes include Hunanese Orange Chicken, red bean soup with chenpi



Slab Sugar/Rock Sugar 片糖/冰糖



- What we eat: sugarcane extract, boiled down and crystallized
- The process of making rock sugar likely originated in the Tang dynasty
- It adds great flavour but also makes sauces shiny
- Recipes: Tong Sui desserts such as snow fungus soup, Braised Meats such as Shanghainese Pork Belly, Nian Gao/New Year cake, Shanghainese Smoked Fish



Cilantro/Coriander 香菜



- What we eat: typically the fresh leaves and dried seeds of the Coriander plant, *coriandrum sativum*, but some countries use the coriander root also
- Also known as Cilantro or Chinese parsley
- Fresh zesty scent but sometimes described as “soapy”
- Grown in regions from Southern Europe to Southwestern Asia
- Most popular as a garnish in Chinese cuisine but also widely used in stir fries



Chinese Chives 韭菜



- What we eat: leaves of the *allium tuberosum* bulb
- Native to China's Shanxi province
- Yellow variety is grown without sunlight so lacks the green pigment and is milder in taste
- Flowering variety has a thicker stem and unopened bud
- Used in dishes such as Chives and Egg stir fry, Pork Chive dumplings, E-Fu Noodles (yellow variety)



Scallion 葱



- What we eat: leaves of the Scallion bulb, from the *allium species*, also known as spring or green onion
- Closely related to onion, garlic
- Native to Asia and has been used in TCM for 2,000 years, often used to treat colds and thought to increase sweating
- In Chinese cuisine, it is most often used as garnish or in combination with ginger and garlic for flavouring
- Recipe: scallion pancakes, ginger scallion sauce



Thai Basil



- What we eat: leaves of a basil plant native to Southeast Asia, it has a stronger smell and taste than sweet basil
- Widely used in Southeast Asian cuisines especially in Thai curries
- High in vitamins and antioxidants
- Not as commonly found in Chinese cuisine but it is a key ingredient in Taiwanese Three Cup Chicken



Recipe Ideas Using Aromatic Spices and Herbs

- Cumin: [Cumin Beef](#), [Cumin-Spiced Chickpeas](#)
- Black Pepper: [Beef Short Ribs with Black Pepper](#)
- Star Anise: [Soy Sauce Chicken](#), [Braised Oxtail](#)
- Cloves, Cinnamon: [Mulled Apple Juice](#), [Spiced Warm Milk](#)
- Ginger: [Ginger Fried Rice](#), [Ginger Red Date Tea](#)
- Chives: [Chive and Egg Stir Fry](#), [Pork and Chive Dumplings](#)
- Scallion: [Scallion and Beef Stir Fry](#)
- Thai Basil: [Taiwanese Popcorn Chicken](#)

