

HERBS & SPICES – Teacher’s Guide

Objective: To provide information on how to cook with herbs & spices maximizing the flavor of low fat foods.

Sample **ANCHOR** questions for participants:

- ***“What are some of the herbs & spices you use frequently in cooking?”***
- ***“Why don’t you cook with many herbs & spices?”***
- ***“Do you have favorite herbs or spices that you use on particular kinds of foods?”***

If during your discussion involving ANCHOR questions participants did not suggest what they would like to learn about cooking, you may want to ask: *“What kind of information about herbs & spices would be useful for you to learn?”*

Background Information - Choose the appropriate information below to **ADD** to your lesson. Demonstrations will be necessary for much of this information.

Difference between herbs and spices

Herbs generally come from the leaves of plants. Spices are usually made from seeds although they can also come from bark, roots, fruits, or flowers of plants. One plant may produce both (ex. leaves are called cilantro and the seeds are coriander).

NOTE: This lesson material should cover the use of herbs and spices for cooking purposes only. The use of herbs for medicinal purposes should never be recommended. Tell participants they should consult their doctor when using herbs for medicinal purposes.

Cooking with Herbs & Spices:

- ◆ Herbs & spices add flavor, aroma and visual appeal to food.
- ◆ Maximize the flavor of low fat foods.
- ◆ Add flavor to food without adding salt or less salt.
- ◆ Are often behind the flavors that make ethnic foods unique.

Herb flavors are strongest when the herb is powdered, less strong when the herb is crumbled or flaked and mildest when the herb is fresh.

A GOOD RULE OF THUMB: Use herbs and spices sparingly to start.

- ☞ If a recipe calls for 1/4 teaspoon of powdered herb, you can use 3/4 to 1 teaspoon crumbled or flaked, or 2 to 3 teaspoons fresh.
- ☞ For starters, try 1/2 teaspoon of spice for a dish that serves 4 to 6.

- Herbs and spices can be expensive. Start with a few basic ones. Black pepper, basil, oregano, garlic powder/salt, and cinnamon can flavor a variety of foods.
- Foods with strong flavors will need more seasoning than foods with weaker flavors.

- To release flavor of dried herbs, crumble them in your palm before adding them to your dish.
- Add whole spices during long cooking times to get the full flavor. Add ground or cut herbs and spices midway or towards end of cooking time so the flavor isn't lost or weakened. For cold foods (dips, dressings, etc.), add herbs several hours before serving.
- Allow for the buildup of the hot flavor with red pepper. The first taste test often seems mild.
- Season only one dish in a meal with the same herb.
- Only two or three foods in a meal should be herbed.

REDUCE FAT

- Instead of flavoring foods with gravy, batter, breading, cheese or butter try using herbs & spices that have far fewer calories.
- Bake, broil or sauté meats. Season "broiled-side" of meat so seasonings do not burn.

REDUCE SUGAR

- For cookies and cakes: Use 1/2 cup sugar for each cup of flour.
- For quick breads and muffins: Use 1 tablespoon sugar for each cup of flour.
- Vanilla, cinnamon, and nutmeg enhance flavor when sugar is reduced.

REDUCE SALT

- Use stronger flavored herbs and spices and those that make foods "hot" and/or "spicy" when replacing the taste of salt. Examples are garlic powder, black pepper, hot peppers, cumin, onion, curry powder, basil, etc.
- Replace garlic and onion salts with powdered garlic and onion. Use only half as much of the powdered garlic and onion.

Storing Herbs & Spices

- Store in tightly covered containers.
- Store containers in a dark, cool, dry cabinet.
- Do not sprinkle dried herbs & spices directly from container into a steaming pot of food to prevent moisture from getting inside container.
- In general store herbs and ground spices for 1 year and whole spices for 2 years. Buy smaller containers of herbs & spices you do not use very often.

ACTIVITIES (APPLY):

1. Set up a display of herb and spice jars so participants can see and smell different herbs and spices. Try to bring some fresh herb plants so they can see what some herbs look like before they are dried.
2. Prepare some foods that have been seasoned with herbs and spices.
3. Allow time for participants to share their own cooking experiences (cooking tips and recipes) with herbs and spices.

Handouts (AWAY):

“No-Salt Seasonings”

“Season with Herbs & Spices”

“Herbs & Spices for Vegetables”

“Recipes Using Herbs & Spices”

“Cooking with Herbs & Spices”

“Salt-Free and Low-Salt Herb Blends-recipes”

“Salt Free Blends of Herbs & Spices”

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