

The Spice of Life

A worksheet for Year 5

Our food would be a lot less tasty without spices. For hundreds of years, we have been adding spices to our cooking to flavour and colour our food. Many of these spices are made from the dried seeds of plants. Can you remember what a seed is?

A seed is the reproductive part of a flowering plant – inside is the tiny new plant which will lie dormant until the conditions are right for it to germinate. Let's explore some of these exotic and often very beautiful edible seeds.



Created as part of
Botany on your Plate,
funded by the
City Bridge Trust.

Cardamom



Cardamom is a plant in the ginger family. The small black seeds come from inside green triangular shaped seed pods. They can be used in sweet and savoury dishes.

Sesame



Sesame seeds are tiny seeds that we also make an oil from. They grow in pods that burst open when they are ripe. They are full of minerals and fibre and are extremely good for us.

Peppercorns



The world's most popular spice. Pepper starts out as a green berry growing on a vine. When they are ready, they are picked and dried in the sun until they become the hard, dried peppercorns we know.

Nutmeg



Nutmeg is the ground seed of a tropical, evergreen tree. This same tree also gives us the spice Mace (see below). Nutmeg has a very distinctive smell and a slightly sweet taste.

Cumin

This slightly bitter tasting spice comes from the seed of the cumin plant. It is often added to curries, or Mexican and Moroccan dishes. The small crescent shaped seeds are usually ground up before used in cooking.



Paprika



Paprika is a ground red spice taken from the fruits of the Capsicum plant. It can come in different flavours – like smoky, sweet or 'picante' (hot).

Mace

Mace is a spice made from the red covering of the nutmeg seed (see above). You get two spices from the one plant! Its flavour is similar to nutmeg, but after drying it turns a pale yellow or orange/brown colour.



Vanilla

Vanilla comes from the seed pods of an orchid called Vanilla. These are quite long (up to 15cm) and are full of oil and tiny black seeds. Their sweet flavour is often used in baking and desserts.



Mustard

Mustard comes from the small round seeds of the mustard plant. They can be yellowish-white or black in colour. The seeds are usually fried until they pop and are often used in spicy cooking. The leaves are also edible and can be eaten like a vegetable.



These are by no means all the spices you can get from seeds. The range and variety are HUGE!

If you can, take a closer look at some of them. If you have hand lenses or magnifying glasses, take a close up look at the surface of the different seeds. Feel the textures, smell the different fragrances by crushing them a little and if you are allowed - have a little taste.



The trade in spices is an incredibly important part of our history. Most of these spices couldn't be grown in our country so we traded with many countries in Asia and around the world in return for these rich and exotic spices.

To find out more about spices, you could:

- Research the various spice routes that were formed in the 15th century between Asia and Europe.
- Discover the different countries that produce these spices – where do they come from?
- Find some recipes that use these spices. The world and its cuisine are a far richer and tastier place for these dried and ground up edible seeds from plants.