



DIANA WRIGHT
FOOD SCIENCE AND NUTRITION



December 2013 - Christmas Spices...

Christmas is here once again and its all sparkle and lots of goodies to eat and drink. This is when we get our bottles of spices out for the traditional Christmas cake and pudding and mince pies. However, is any of this good for us? Spices have been used for cuisine and trade since 2000bc (Wikipedia) and in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, there is the story of Joseph who was sold as a slave to spice merchants by his brothers. In the biblical poem Song of Solomon, the 'beloved' is compared to many forms of spices. Spices originated from Asia and Middle East and were among the most demanded and expensive products available in Europe in the Middle ages mainly due to the transport over thousands of miles. They are aromatic and give beautiful spicy tastes to many other now familiar foods that we eat such as curry's and stir fries. They also have health qualities such as reducing inflammation and helping blood sugar balance. Most of all, they were 'Fit for the King' being given in worship of the birth of Jesus by those who visited Him in those few days after being born in the manger.

Recipes with Christmas spices



FOOD SCIENCE

Here are a few nutritional facts about spices...

Cinnamon - 1 teaspoon of cinnamon contains 28mg of calcium, almost 1mg of iron, over a gram of fibre and quite a lot of vitamins such as C K and manganese. Several studies have shown improved insulin sensitivity and blood glucose control by taking ½ teaspoon of cinnamon per day. This in turn will help weight control as well as decreasing the risk of heart disease.

Cloves - The active principles in cloves are known to have antioxidant, anti-septic, anti-inflammatory and anti-flatulent properties. It contains an oil called eugenol which has local anaesthetic and antiseptic properties. It also contains a good amount of minerals such as potassium, manganese, iron, selenium and magnesium which are vital in our body. The spice also contains good amounts of vitamin A.

Cardamom - contains many chemical compounds that are known to have anti-oxidant, disease preventing and health promoting properties. Cardamom is a good source of minerals like potassium,



Braised beef with cranberries and spices (serves 8) ~ *cinnamon, ginger*

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 8 thick braising steaks, 1kg meat in total
- 2 large onions, very finely chopped, preferably in a food processor
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced
- 25g ginger, peeled and cut into slivers
- good pinch saffron
- 2 cinnamon sticks, snapped in half
- 1 tbsp ground coriander
- 1 tbsp harissa
- 2 tbsp ground almonds
- 1.2l hot beef stock
- 2 bay leaves
- 85g dried cranberries

Method

- Heat the oil in a large flameproof casserole dish. Add the steaks 4 at a time and brown them well on both sides, then transfer to a plate. Now add the onions, garlic and ginger to the oil, plus juices left in the dish, and fry for at least 15 mins, stirring very frequently, until they are golden and soft.
- Add the saffron, cinnamon sticks, coriander, harissa and ground almonds, and stir well for 1 min.
- Tip in the stock, then return the meat to the dish. Add the bay leaves, cover and simmer for 1 hr.
- Remove the lid and cook for another 1 hr 30 mins, checking occasionally to ensure the mixture doesn't catch on the bottom.
- Add the cranberries 10 mins before the end

calcium and magnesium. Potassium is an important part of cell and body fluids that helps control heart rate and blood pressure. It is also an excellent source of iron and manganese. Iron is required for red blood cell formation and cellular metabolism.

Ginger - Ginger maintains normal blood circulation as chromium, magnesium and zinc improves blood flow. It also improves the absorption of essential nutrients in the body by stimulating gastric and pancreatic enzyme secretion. It is a natural powerful painkiller as it contains some of the most potent anti-inflammatory fighting substances. As well as this, ginger decreases bacterial infections on the stomach, helps battle coughs and throat irritation and can help to inhibit fatty deposits from the arteries.

Nutmeg - Nutmeg has anti-fungal, anti-depressant and digestive functions. It is a good source of minerals like copper, potassium, calcium, manganese, iron, zinc and magnesium. It is also rich in many vital B-complex vitamins, including vitamin C, folic acid, riboflavin, vitamin A and many anti-oxidants like beta-carotene which is essential for good health.

Turmeric - Turmeric features antibacterial and antiseptic qualities, so can be used to treat wounds. There is evidence that it aids in the restructuring of skin so may prevent scarring after injuries. It prevents breast cancer by altering cancer cells as it contains a powerful antioxidant compound that has reduced the size of tumours in 9 different studies. It can also be used to ease the side effects and boost the effects of some chemotherapy drugs. Many other medicinal properties include detoxifying the liver, helping in the metabolizing of fat and preventing the progression of Alzheimer's disease by removing the plaque build up in the brain that is believed to trigger Alzheimer. Turmeric has anti-inflammatory compounds which work to reduce joint pain and inflammation.

Diana regularly provides talks for various groups and has spoken on key issues at UK and international health conferences, please view

of the cooking time so they can plump up in the gravy. Check the beef after the cooking time - it should pull apart easily with 2 forks. If not, add a splash more water or stock and cook for another 30 mins.

- Remove cinnamon and bay leaves.



Gingerbread men

(makes 12 large) ~ *cinnamon, ginger*

Ingredients

140g unsalted butter
100g dark muscovado sugar
3 tbsp golden syrup
350g plain flour
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
2 tsp ground ginger and 1 tsp ground cinnamon
pinch of cayenne pepper (optional)
2 balls stem ginger from a jar, chopped

To decorate

50g icing sugar
a few glacé cherries
2 balls stem ginger

Method

- Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6. Line 2 baking sheets with baking parchment. Melt butter, sugar and syrup in a pan. Mix flour, soda, spices and a pinch of salt in a bowl. Stir in the butter mix and chopped ginger to make a stiff-ish dough.
- Wait until cool enough to handle, then roll out dough to about 5mm thick. Stamp out gingerbread men, re-rolling and pressing the

www.dianawright.co.uk/about.html
for more detailed information.

CONTACT US

nutrition@dianawright.co.uk
01494 722777

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trimmings back together and rolling again. Lift onto baking sheets. Bake for 12 mins until golden. Cool 10 mins on the sheets, then lift onto cooling racks.

- To decorate, mix icing sugar with a few drops of water until thick and smooth. Halve then slice cherries thinly to make smiles, and cut ginger into small squares. Spoon icing into a food bag, snip off the tiniest bit from one corner, then squeeze eyes and buttons, and a tiny smile onto 1 man at a time. Stick on a cherry smile and ginger buttons. Repeat; leave to set. Will keep up to 1 week in an airtight tin.



Low Sugar Spiced fruit cake
(12 slices) ~ *cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, mixed spice*

Ingredients

85g self-raising flour
140g wholemeal plain flour
1 tsp baking powder
100g low sugar apricot jam
50gm caster sugar
4-5 cardamom pods
zest 1 small orange
½ tsp cinnamon
½ tsp mixed spice
¼ tsp nutmeg
140g butter, cut into pieces
100g pecans
85g raisins, preferably golden or green
85g sultanas
85g dried cranberries
1 egg
125ml milk

For the topping

85g frozen cranberries, thawed

25g dark brown sugar

Method

- Butter and base-line a deep 18cm round, loose-bottomed cake tin. Heat oven to 170C/fan 150C/gas 3. For the cake, stir together the flours, baking powder, 50 gm sugar. Slit open the cardamom pods and remove the tiny seeds (discard the pods). Grind the seeds to a powder using a pestle and mortar, then stir into the flour mixture with the orange zest and all the other spices.
- Rub the butter into the mix until it looks like coarse crumbs. Coarsely chop half the pecans and stir into the mix with the raisins, sultanas and cranberries. Beat the egg, pour in the milk and stir into the cake mixture the jam. Spoon the mixture into the tin, level the top and scatter over the remaining pecan halves. Bake for 45 mins, then lower the heat to 150C/fan 130C/ gas 2 and bake for another 45 mins.
- While the cake bakes, prepare the topping. Pat the cranberries dry on kitchen paper, then toss with the sugar in a small bowl. After the second 45 mins of baking, spoon the sugared cranberries over the top of the cake. Return to the oven for another 15-20 mins, or until the cranberries are sticky and a skewer inserted into the cake comes out clean.
- Leave the cake to cool in the tin, then turn out onto a wire rack. The cake is best kept overnight for the flavours to mellow before slicing.



Thai green chicken curry (serves 6) ~ *ginger, turmeric*

Ingredients

1kg pack boneless skinless chicken thighs
1 thumb-size piece of fresh ginger, peeled and very finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
15g pack fresh coriander, chopped
juice of 1 lime
2 tbsp sunflower oil
2 medium onions
1 tsp ground turmeric
400ml can reduced-fat coconut milk
1 chicken stock cube

Method

- Slice each chicken thigh into 2 or 3 large chunks, then put in a bowl with the ginger, garlic green thai curry paste, half the coriander, lime juice and 1 tbsp of the oil. Stir well, then cover and leave in the fridge to marinate until ready to cook. For the best flavour, do this in the morning or, better still, the night before. You don't have to though-it still tastes great done in the moment!
- Peel and slice the onions, then very finely chop them Heat the remaining oil in a wok or large frying pan, then add the onion and stir-fry for about 8 mins until soft. Tip in the chicken mixture with the marinade and cook over a high heat until the chicken changes colour and browns.
- Pour in the coconut milk, and stock cube, then cover and simmer for 10 mins until the chicken is tender.

- Stir in the turmeric, adding the pack of stir fry vegetables stirring well and cook for 5 mins more
- Stir in the remaining coriander, then serve with brown basmati rice and broccoli.



Sweet Potato, carrot and swede mash (serves 4) ~ *nutmeg*

Ingredients

3 large sweet potatoes
3 carrots
½ swede
25g butter
splash of milk or cream
good grating of nutmeg

Method

- Cut the veg into similar-sized chunks. Tip into a pan of cold salted water, bring to a boil, cover, then cook for 15-20 mins until all the vegetables are tender.
- Drain, leave to steam-dry for a few mins, then tip back into the pan and mash with the butter, milk or cream, nutmeg and some seasoning. Keep warm until ready to serve.



Cardamom meringue nests (serves 10) ~ *cardamom*

Ingredients

6 egg whites

350g caster sugar

2 tsp cardamom powder

1 tsp cocoa

Method

- Heat oven to 150C/130C fan/gas 2 and line 2 baking trays with baking parchment. Put egg whites in a clean bowl and beat with an electric whisk until they resemble stiff peaks. While whisking, add the sugar, 1 tbsp at a time - meringue will thicken and become glossy. Fold in cardamom.
- Using a metal spoon, dollop small spoonfuls of meringue, evenly spaced, onto the baking sheets, to make around 48 mini meringues. With the back of the spoon, lightly flatten and hollow out the centres. Sieve a dusting of cocoa over them and bake for 1 hr until crisp. Turn off the oven and leave meringues in the oven to cool. Pile high on a plate and serve with flavoured creams.

It takes us 4 hours to wake up apparently!
Amersham nutritionist Diana Wright tells @iainlee why. She comes prepared! [twitter.com/BBC3CR/status/...](https://twitter.com/BBC3CR/status/1391111111)
BBC Three Counties (@BBC3CR) September 13, 2012

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