

## Historical Uses of Herbs and Spices in different Cultures

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### Editorial

A culinary herb is a plant's leaf that is used in cooking, whereas a spice is some other part of the plant that is dried. Spices include clove as buds, cinnamon as bark, ginger as roots, peppercorns as berries, aromatic seeds (cumin), and even the stigma of a flower (saffron). Spices are made from aromatic seeds that are collected from plants after they have finished flowering. Coriander is a well-known example, with the leaves being classified as a herb and the dried seeds as a spice. Coriander's stem and roots, as well as onions, garlic, and fennel bulb, are mostly used fresh and applied in a similar way to cooking. Herbs and spices have long been used in cooking and as preservatives, as well as offering health benefits. Coriander, fennel, juniper, cumin, garlic, and thyme are all mentioned in ancient Egyptian papyri dating back to 1555 BCE.

According to legend, Sumerians used thyme for its medicinal properties as early as 5000 BCE, and Mesopotamian farmers grew garlic as early as 3000 BCE. Spices were traded internationally from 4500-1900 BCE, mostly with Ethiopia. Around this time, the Assyrians in Mesopotamia (now Iraq and Iran) developed knowledge of the health benefits of herbs, and juniper, saffron, and thyme are mentioned. Herbs, rather than spices, seem to have been used more often in ancient Greece and Rome. Hippocrates (460-377 BCE) had 300 remedies in his arsenal, including garlic, cinnamon, and rosemary, all of which were readily available. Garlic was reportedly used to treat uterine cancer. Plants' health benefits are veiled in folklore in China. Sheng Nong, the Divine Husbandman (2838-2698 BCE) and Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor (2698-2598 BCE) are two mythical Chinese emperors who are credited with discovering and documenting the medicinal properties of herbs. Food, diet, and health have often been intertwined in Chinese culture, and herbs and spices are frequently used in specially prepared soups, sauces, or drinks for both sustenance and presumed health benefits. Ginseng and Ginkgo biloba are said to help with endurance and cognitive function, respectively. Galangal is used for stomach pain, nutmeg is used for diarrhoea, and cinnamon is used for colds and flu. Ayurveda, India's traditional medicine, originated in the Himalayas more than 5000 years ago, with wisdom passed down orally before it was written down in Sanskrit poetry the Vedas around 1500 BCE. It reached its pinnacle in the seventh century.

Ayurveda is a system of medicine that focuses on disease prevention and health promotion, with a particular emphasis on food. ten, eleven Turmeric for jaundice, basil for heart protection, mace for stomach infections, cinnamon to promote circulation,

and ginger as the universal medicine, especially for nausea and indigestion, are examples of Ayurvedic uses of herbs and spices for health effects. Many of these herbs and spices are used to impart flavour in Indian cuisine, and large amounts can be consumed in a single meal. It has been documented that herbs and spices can provide adequate amounts of nutrients, such as iron. An adult in India could consume up to 4gm of turmeric per day, providing 80-200mg of the bioactive component curcumin on a daily basis. Some Indians are said to consume up to 50 grams of garlic per week. Following the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE, the growth of Arabic medicine from 500-1300 CE retained some of the information about the health benefits of herbs and spices, and expanded on Galen's knowledge. Awareness of Arabic medicine made its way back to Europe in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, trade with Africa and Asia was bringing in new herbs and spices. Galangal was known as the "spice of life" at the time. Herbalists used garlic to treat the plague. It was later discovered to destroy bacteria by Louis Pasteur (1822-1895 CE), and it was also used on battlefields to avoid gangrene. Mediterranean diets have been linked to a lower risk of some chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer. Although dietary studies are difficult to interpret, Mediterranean diets contain significant quantities of garlic, rosemary, basil, and thyme, among other herbs, which may help to explain some of the protective effects seen in populations eating more conventional Mediterranean diets.

The Indigenous people of Australia created their own herbal medicine based on the plants that were available. Because of their isolation, the Indigenous people were not exposed to Western diseases, and as a result, herbs and plants were produced to treat less severe ailments. River mint is used for coughs and colds, and wattle and eucalyptus are used for diarrhoea, fever, headaches, and a variety of other illnesses. Herbs and spices may be one of the first functional foods ever documented, given their long history of use.

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