

# A Spice Primer

## Part 2



### Ginger

It's not at all as strange and lumpy as it looks. On the contrary: When it comes to taste, the finger-shaped gingerroot is an extremely elegant spice. Unique, original, with a fiery, prickly, mildly sweet bite.

Ginger is one of the oldest tropical spices. Native to East Asia, today it's cultivated in nearly all tropical zones – such as in China, India or Brazil. The part of the plant that is used as a spice is its rhizome, the root-like subterranean stem of the up to 1.2-meter-high ginger tree. It is harvested around nine to eleven months after being planted.

Outside Asia, ginger is used in beverages (Ginger Ale), candies and cookies, or to season vegetables. And it's also the main ingredient in curry blends.

### Juniper

It's a "holy" plant, because the Germanic tribes used it to drive away evil spirits. During the Middle Ages, the smoke from its burning sprigs was used to protect against witches and the plague. And not without reason, because the needle-like, pointed leaves of the evergreen juniper bush or tree are toxic. Its ripe, blue-black berries, on the other hand, contain a pungent essential oil to which healing powers are attributed. When the berries ripen and turn blue, they are picked and then dried.



In the kitchen, juniper lends a hearty aroma to fish and meat dishes, game, marinades and sauerkraut. It is also highly popular in alcoholic beverages – like schnapps, gin or genever.

### Rosemary

In the ancient world, rosemary was considered to be a symbol of marriage and love – but also of death. The ancient Egyptians laid sprigs of rosemary in the graves of their pharaohs in order to smooth their way to the other world.



And the fragrant sprigs with their bluish-violet, and sometimes white, blossoms have a long history of being used as a remedy against every conceivable ailment. Today, the bushy rosemary shrub, which can grow to a height of up to two meters, is cultivated in many countries in the Temperate Zone – in Italy, France and England, as well as in Germany. Rosemary is a spice that is used first and foremost in Italian, French and Spanish cuisine. Sprigs of rosemary, which are removed prior to serving, lend a dry-spicy aroma to game, poultry, fish and rice dishes, for example.

### Mint

Who says the British don't understand anything about eating! They were the ones who discovered peppermint as a



kitchen herb, in effect taking it out of apothecaries and putting it into cooking pots.

The mint plant is native to the Mediterranean region. It grows to a height of 50 to 80 centimeters and has white, pink or violet blossoms. There are around 20 varieties worldwide, which all have one thing in common: An extremely fresh scent and taste, and the characteristic feeling of coolness in the mouth. What's responsible for that is the high menthol content in the essential oil of the leaves. So it comes as no surprise that this herb is a popular ingredient in chewing gums and refreshers. Also famous are the English mint sauces, which taste delicious as an accompaniment to lamb chops. And mint also turns vegetables like zucchini, young carrots or peas into a true taste experience.

native to the Mediterranean region. Its gray-green leaves were not only employed as a remedy, but presumably also as an early dentifrice. Today, sage – acknowledged by the medical community – is still being employed to promote the health of the throat, mouth and teeth.

But it takes sage to turn tomatoes, lamb, pork and veal, as well as fried poultry liver and game, into true delights. World famous Saltimbocca Romana (veal cutlet smothered in Parma ham and sage) stands and falls with the aroma of these fragrant, felt-like leaves.

### **Sage**

When it comes to sage, it can truly be said that less is more. Sage is used in



many dishes, but only in minute amounts. Yet without it, many dishes would lack a crucial ingredient. The pale blue and violet blossoming sage bush is