

# A Spice Primer, Part 3

## They spice up foods

### Caraway

It certainly isn't one of the gentle spices. When caraway is part of the recipe, the taste sensation is more like a drumbeat. The earliest known Central European spice – residues have been found in Stone Age dwellings – is highly unique: Hearty, rural and unmistakably savory. Opinions differ when it comes to its taste. People either love caraway or they hate it – there's rarely any middle ground.



This unassuming plant with its finely feathered leaves and white blossoms has long since developed into a true cosmopolitan that thrives in numerous regions around the globe.

Caraway has a sweetish smell and lends foods a hearty-savory taste. It goes superbly with cabbage dishes, celery, mutton, sausage salad, carrots, cheese and bread.

### Thyme

One of the meanings of the Greek word "thymos" is courage. So it comes as no surprise that thyme used to symbolize strength and bravery. The ancient Greeks rubbed thyme oil on their bodies after bathing. And the Roman legionnaires, too, took thyme baths to give them strength. This aromatic plant



with its mildly resinous smell is even said to have an aphrodisiac effect.

Although the thyme bush with its pink to violet blossoms is native to the Mediterranean region, it thrives in many areas of the world today. It is harvested either just before or while it blooms. The stalks of the bushes are cut off as low as possible, and both the leaves and sprout tips are dried.

Thyme has a bitter-savory taste and is an indispensable ingredient in French cuisine. It is used to enhance fish and cabbage dishes, tomato dishes, vegetables, potatoes, soups, sauces and salads.

### Marjoram

Its name might possibly be of Arabian origin: marjamie can be roughly translated as "incomparable." Among the ancient Greeks and Romans, marjoram was attributed to Aphrodite; it had mythological significance in sacrificial offerings and was felt to enhance potency. They used it to season

wine and virtually all meat dishes. It was also employed for centuries as a medicinal plant.

When you taste marjoram, you'll usually know it immediately: Although related to thyme and oregano, it tastes finer and sweeter than thyme and not as spicy as oregano (which is also called wild marjoram). The plant is typified by its felty-gray cilia and white-purple



blossoms.

Marjoram – fresh or dried – is the world's most popular savory herb, along with parsley and chives. It goes well with any number of foods: Potato soup, roast duck or goose, giblets, fish soups or game, and it's the classical spice for seasoning sausage.

### Tarragon

The Romans attributed a medicinal effect to tarragon (which is sometimes also called estragon). Among other things, when worn on clothing a bouquet of this fragrant herb was said to be a sure safeguard against

snakebites. Tarragon tastes highly aromatic, peppery and slightly bitter – although its taste can vary: Russian tarragon is drier and slightly chervil-like, while French and German varieties are milder.

What are used for seasoning are the plant's oval leaves, which are harvested before it blooms, as well as its young shoots. Tarragon is especially popular in French cuisine: In making mustard and for seasoning vinegar, in herb butter and as an indispensable ingredient in Sauce Béarnaise. But this spice also goes superbly with sole, poultry, cucumber, vegetables and other dishes.

