

Holiday Spice and Everything Nice

Don't forget spices when you are planning your holiday fare. They provide a rich, warm flavor and aroma that enhances many dishes.

Here are 5 spices you won't want to forget.

Cinnamon is a popular spice that comes ground or in rolled sticks. It is a sweet or savory spice. Add it to home made apple sauce or poached fruits.

Nutmeg can be used grated or milled. It is wonderful when added to a banana smoothie to add an egg nog flavor to a more healthful beverage.

Ginger is the world's favorite spice according to many cooking authorities. It comes in many forms: dried, fresh, or candied. Dried ginger powder makes a welcome addition to sweet potatoes or winter squash. Fresh ginger is a wonderful addition to stir fry dishes and fresh vegetables. And candied ginger makes a great garnish for pumpkin pie.

Cloves are an ancient spice. They come in a dried form as a whole or ground spice. They should be used sparingly because the flavor is very strong. They make a delicious addition to fruit tea. It is a good idea to insert them into orange rinds before adding to your holiday tea.

Allspice tastes like a mix between cinnamon and nutmeg with just a touch of cloves. It is nature's own holiday spice blend. It can be used for roasted vegetables, rice, and jerk seasoning paste. A slight amount added to chicken, shrimp or fish can bring an island flavor to many favorite dishes.

Mulled Holiday Tea

Ingredients:

3 quarts simmering water
3 red fruit tea bags
3 regular tea bags
1 orange, cut in quarters and studded with 4 whole cloves
1 lemon, cut in quarters
1/2 cup cranberries
2 cinnamon sticks

Directions:

1. Simmer water in a large pot on the stove.
2. Add all ingredients and turn the heat to low.
3. Heat for a few minutes until the tea is steeped.
4. Remove the tea bags.
5. Serve hot to your guests.

Serves 12. Each 1 cup serving: 2 calories, 0g fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 10mg sodium, 0g carbohydrate, 0g fiber, 0g sugars, 0g protein

Banana Nog

Ingredients:

4 bananas, peeled
1-1/2 cups skim milk
1-1/2 cups plain nonfat yogurt
1/4 teaspoon rum extract
pinch ground nutmeg

Directions:

1. Add all ingredients except nutmeg to blender or food processor.
2. Puree until smooth.
3. Pour into 4 fancy serving glasses and top each with a pinch nutmeg.

Serves 4. Each 1 cup serving: 198 calories, 2g fat, 1g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 7mg cholesterol, 114mg sodium, 38g carbohydrate, 3g fiber, 26g sugars, 9g protein.

Holiday Ginger Vegetables

Ingredients:

2 teaspoons olive or canola oil
1 teaspoon minced ginger
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1 cup sliced bell peppers
1 cup broccoli florets
1 cup cranberries water

Directions:

1. Heat the oil in a large sauté or Dutch oven pan. Add the ginger and garlic and cook quickly, about 1 minute. Add the peppers, broccoli and cranberries and sauté briefly.
2. Add the water and cover for 2 minutes to steam the veggies. They are done when crisp-tender - no more than 3 minutes. Serve the veggies hot on a serving platter or individual plates. You can serve a wedge of orange to the side for more flavor. The ginger is a wonderful addition and if you don't have fresh ginger on hand you can use a tiny dash of ground ginger while the veggies are cooking.

Serves 4. Each 1 cup serving: 53 calories, 2g fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 137mg sodium, 9g carbohydrate, 2g fiber, 0g sugars, 2g protein

Winter Squash Bake

Ingredients:

1 lb frozen winter squash, thawed
4 tsp maple syrup
1/4 tsp allspice
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

Directions:

1. Mix ingredients in a medium-sized bowl and place in a covered casserole dish.
2. Cover and bake at 350 °F until hot, about 45 minutes. Serve hot.

Serves 4. Each 1/2 cup serving: 88 calories, 1g fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 3mg sodium, 21g carbohydrate, 6g fiber, 9g sugars, 2g protein.

Cranberry Pear Relish

Ingredients:

1 bag fresh cranberries
1 cup water
3/4 cup sugar
1 cup diced pear
1 pinch apple pie spice
1 orange, zest and juice

Directions:

1. Place all items in a medium-sized saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce to simmer and cook on low heat, covered, for 10 minutes. Serve warm or chill for later use.
2. Chef's Tips:
3. This recipe can be made and frozen ahead of time. It is best to defrost overnight in the refrigerator.

Serves 10. Each 1/2 cup serving: 77 calories, 0g fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 2mg sodium, 20g carbohydrate, 1g fiber, 18g sugars, 0g protein.

Pumpkin Pie Bread Pudding

Ingredients:

5 slices whole wheat bread, cubed
15-ounce can pumpkin
1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
1-1/2 cups skim milk
1/2 cup sugar
1 tablespoon chopped pecans

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Lightly spray a large ceramic baking dish with vegetable oil. Combine pumpkin with spices, milk and sugar. Add cubed bread and mix well. Pour into baking dish and top with chopped pecans.
2. Bake for 45 minutes or until firm in center. Cool for 5 minutes and slice into 8 pieces.

Serves 8. Each 1/8 of a slice serving: 135 calories, 2g fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 1mg cholesterol, 240mg sodium, 27g carbohydrate, 3g fiber, 18g sugars, 5g protein.