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# SPICE DETECTIVES

## OVERVIEW

This lesson familiarizes children with the spices that you commonly use at home or in favorite recipes that are served for school meals. You can learn about 4 spices in a day, and can repeat the lesson on multiple days to learn about additional spices.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. Become familiar with four different spices (you can repeat this lesson on different days with different spices).
2. Learn about the part of the plant that the spice comes from.
3. Learn to distinguish spices from herbs.
4. Know what family or school recipe the spice is used in.
5. Be able to distinguish the different spices by smell.
6. Optional: Learn how to make a recipe using a spice.

## MATERIALS

1. Choose four spices that you commonly use.
2. A computer with internet access.
3. A bandana or other item you can use as a blind-fold. One per child.
4. Optional: ingredients for a recipe that uses one or more of the spices to make together after the spice lesson.

## PREP STEPS

1. Place the spices and bandana out on a table. Remove the lid from the spice jars.
2. If you will be making the recipe after the spice lesson, get the ingredients and materials out and ready to use.

## ACTIVITY STEP-BY-STEP

### Learning About the Spices

Explain to your child(ren) that spices are used to make foods taste better. Spices come from the seeds, bark, fruits, and roots of a plant. Some examples are:

- A. Cinnamon comes from the bark of a tree.
- B. Ginger comes from the root of a plant.
- C. Cloves come from a flower bud.
- D. Cumin comes from a seed.

### Smelling the Spices & Questions About Each

Now, have your child(ren) smell each different spice that you have chosen. **Caution: Make sure they don't inhale the spices, tell them to smell gently! Also, be sure that for spices made from hot peppers, that they don't touch to top of the bottle where they may get spice on their fingers and then touch their eyes, which can cause burning and pain.**

For each spice:

1. Ask if they know what part of the plant it comes from. You can ask them to guess if they don't know. If you have a spice and you don't know what part of the plant it comes from, take the time to look it up online with your child(ren) and find out.
2. Talk about what recipes you use them in. For example, maybe you add cinnamon to your oatmeal, or chili powder to your chili. Perhaps you decorate oranges with cloves to create a nice smell in your home in the winter. Or maybe you use cumin to flavor black beans for a burrito.

### The Blind Smell Test

Ask if your child(ren) want to be blindfolded to see if they can identify a spice without seeing the spice or the name on the container. We understand that some children may not want to be blindfolded, but for some this will be a fun activity. Another option is to ask your child(ren) to close their eyes, or to hold up a piece of paper in front of the spice container so your child(ren) cannot see it.

After the blindfold is on or your child(ren)'s eyes are closed, see if they can guess each spice. If they can't, tell them what it is, move on to another spice, and then come back to any spices they didn't get right the first time. Repeat until they can identify all spices just by smell. You can also ask them if they remember which recipe you use that spice in.

### Distinguish Spices from Herbs

Remind your child(ren) that spices come from seeds, bark, fruits and roots of a plant. Ask which parts of a plant are missing from this description. If they say leaves or stems, you can tell them they are right! Otherwise lead them to the answer of leaves. Explain that herbs are used in the same way as spices, to make foods taste better. The main difference is which part of the plant they food comes from. **Optional Activity:** Get out an equal number of herbs and spices (not already used in this activity). Ask your child(ren) to put all the spices on one side of the table and all the herbs on the other side.

### Review

Ask your child(ren) what they learned. If they need prompting, ask them:

- Why do people use spices?
- What parts of the plant do spices come from?
- Which spices did we learn about today?

- What recipes do we make with those spices?
- What is the difference between herbs and spices.

## MAKE A RECIPE

This is an optional part of this lesson and will depend on your child(ren)'s age and attention span. We recommend making oatmeal with cinnamon as an easy first recipe. Perhaps your family already eats oatmeal.

Our Earth-Friendly Plant-Powered Recipes from Around the World served in school cafeterias are also great recipes to make with your children. You can find family sized versions of them here:

<https://healthyschoolfood.org/wp/create-change/recipes/> and click on "Ithaca Family Size Recipes".

When children make something themselves, they are more likely to try it and enjoy it. Young children are quite capable of preparing food, getting help with sharp knives or stoves or ovens.

### Apple Pie Oatmeal

Serves 4

*Who says kids don't like oatmeal? Years ago, in a school on Long Island, it was reported that the children would not eat the oatmeal, and were going hungry at breakfast. The Coalition for Healthy School Food went in with this recipe, flyers that said "Apple Pie Oatmeal" with a picture of steaming apple pie, and fancy pencils for each child who tried it. Almost every child was willing to try it, and almost every child loved it. This recipe is for home use. It's great for a cold winter morning.*

**Serves 4 (divide in half for 2 or in quarters for 1)**

2 cups raw old-fashioned oats (not quick or instant)

4 cups water or unsweetened non-dairy milk (or any combination of the two)

Few shakes of cinnamon, to taste

2 apples, grated (peel if not organic, you can grate them on a cheese grater)

4 teaspoons pure maple syrup (this was used in the school, at home you can use 4 chopped dates instead for a whole food alternative)

Bring oats, water, cinnamon, grated apple, and maple syrup or dates to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until liquid is absorbed, and oatmeal is desired consistency, about 10 – 20 minutes. Stir occasionally to prevent sticking.

**Optional:** sprinkle with raw walnuts, sliced bananas, and fresh or dried berries after cooking for some extra pizzazz.

**Variation 1:** you can replace the apples with fresh or frozen peaches for peach pie oatmeal.

**Variation 2:** you can replace the maple syrup with raisins, dates, dried cherries, or other dried fruit.

**Just one or two of you?** Cut recipe in half or quarter. It's easy!

*Recipe by Coalition for Healthy School Food*