



# From the Food Bank Kitchen

## Spice Up Healthy Eating

*Buying spices may not be your first priority; they can be expensive and do not help keep you full or give you energy. However, small bottles can last for many meals, so invest in them when you can — check with your local dollar store or discount grocer for good deals. Stores that sell spices in bulk often offer great deals for very small amounts like 1-2 tablespoons if you only need a little bit for a specific recipe. Herbs and spices are a great seasoning alternative to salt, which can contribute to high blood pressure and heart problems. Dietary Guidelines recommend most adults reduce sodium intake to under 2,300 mg per day (about a teaspoon of salt). For adults age 51 and older, African Americans of any age, and people with high blood pressure or chronic kidney disease, the recommendation is even lower—a maximum of 1,500 mg per day. There are sodium-free spice blends like Mrs. Dash and similar products, as well as lower sodium store-bought or homemade dressings and marinades. For more info on this and other topics related to healthy eating, check out the resources on [eatright.org](http://eatright.org).*

1. Garlic & Onions – Fresh or dried onion and garlic add flavor to any dish. Use with meat, veggies, soups, and eggs.
2. Cumin— This spice is also a healthy antioxidant, and is often used in Mexican, Spanish, Indian, and middle eastern dishes. It goes well with curried vegetables, and in beans, poultry, and fish.
3. Black Pepper— Pepper is best when fresh ground and can really make a difference in any dish. In Italy, a favorite dish is just pasta with fresh ground pepper and butter. If you don't have access to a pepper grinder, pre-ground works just as well.
4. Vinegars— Different varieties of vinegar like Apple Cider, balsamic, or white vinegar offer different flavors. They do not have to be expensive or rare, and many vinegars are available for a reasonable price at a local store.
5. Oregano & Thyme— Oregano, like garlic, can be used in any cuisine and adds new flavor to many dishes. It can be used in soups, meat and poultry, rice, in sauces, or for homemade salad dressings. Italian and Greek cuisine often call for oregano.

All of these options are free of salt and sodium, and provide an inexpensive way to add flavor to any meal! Store spices in a cool, dry place in tightly covered containers. Label spice bottles with the date opened, and try to use them within one year for maximum flavor. Fresh herbs can be chopped and frozen in ice cube trays, then stored in a freezer bag for future use.

### KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

(Source: [UNL Extension Program](#))

The terms “herbs” and “spices” are often used interchangeably to mean seasonings. Both herbs and spices, along with marinades and seasoning blends, help to flavor foods, but they are not the same thing.

**Herbs**— Herbs are leaves from low-growing shrubs. They include oregano, dill, parsley, chives, rosemary, sage, and many others. When substituting dried for fresh, use a ratio of 3 fresh to 1 dried. For example; use 1 teaspoon of dried basil when substituting in a recipe that calls for 3 teaspoons of fresh basil. If doubling a recipe, you may not need to double the herbs; just use 50% more.

**Spices**— Spices come from the bark, root, buds, or seeds, from plants and trees. Some common spices include ginger, cinnamon, garlic, cloves, poppy seeds, black pepper, and paprika.

**Seasoning Blends**— Can be a mixture of herbs and spices. You can buy them at the store, like “Italian blend”, or make your own with blends like oregano, basil, garlic, rosemary, and thyme!

### Tips for using and herbs and spices

(Source: [Herbs and Spices to “Spark” Your Food](#), Sparkpeople.com)

- Add herbs and spices to cold dishes several hours before serving to allow the flavors to blend.
- When cooking, add dried herbs early in the process, but use fresh herbs at the end for optimum flavor.
- Fresh leaves should be chopped finely. If you are not comfortable using a knife, try using scissors to make smaller cuts.
- Consider growing herbs like basil, thyme, mint, and parsley in a small indoor pot to use in your cooking.