



It wasn't so long ago that if you wanted to experiment with exotic spices, you had to buy a grinder and whole spices like cardamom and allspice, then come up with your own blends. Nowadays, thanks to the influx of immigrants and more adventurous palates, once-inaccessible blends such as zaatar are in the grocery store.

Here we introduce you to five that will liven up your next meal.

It's as simple as a sprinkle and knowing which blend pairs best with which kinds of food.

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Learn

PANCH PHORON

(panch PORE-n)
"Five spices" in Bengali

POPULAR IN Northeast India and Bangladesh.

THE BLEND Five seeds: cumin, fennel, fenugreek, brown mustard, and nigella.

FLAVORS Bittersweet and licorice-y.

TRY THIS Pop briefly in hot ghee or oil to release flavors; don't scorch, or seeds will get bitter. • Simmer in a dal or chicken-vegetable stew. • Knead into bread dough. • Season marinades for roasted meats. • Sauté with sliced cabbage.



GARAM MASALA

(gah-RAHM muh-SAH-luh)
"Hot spice mixture" in Hindi

POPULAR IN Northern India.

THE BLEND Coriander, pepper, cumin, green and sometimes black cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, bay leaves, nutmeg or mace, and ginger—the exact combo can vary.

FLAVORS Warm and earthy, with a hint of sweetness.

TRY THIS Sizzle garam masala in oil to release its aroma. Then, add it early in cooking for a mellow taste—to samosas, say (get the recipe on sunset.com). • Or add it just before serving to brighten flavors: Swirl into chicken curry, or drizzle over pan-fried paneer (fresh Indian cheese).

ZAATAR

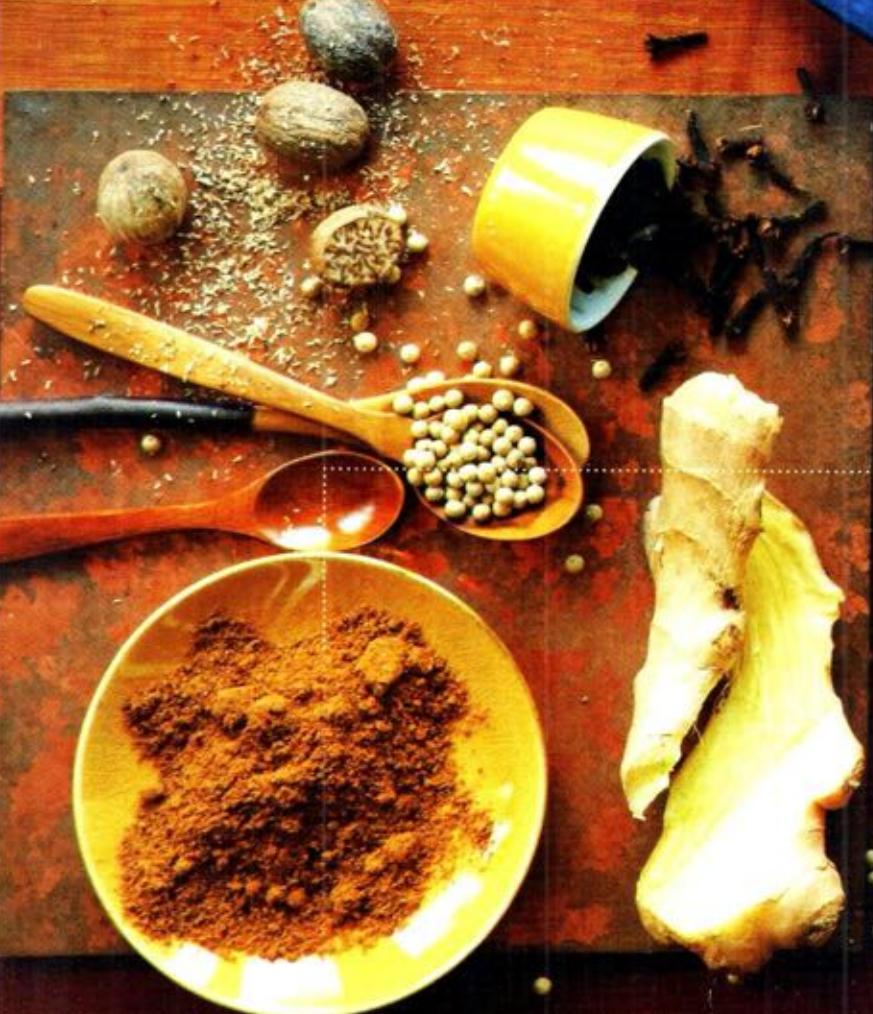
(ZAH-tar) "Thyme" in Arabic

POPULAR IN The Middle East, into Turkey and North Africa.

THE BLEND The two basic styles are green (aka Israeli), made with thyme—alone, or with other herbs plus sesame seeds; and red (aka Syrian), adding zingy sumac, cumin, and coriander.

FLAVORS Pungently herbaceous, nutty, and sometimes tart.

TRY THIS Sprinkle over bread before baking (look for zaatar flatbread on sunset.com). • Pat onto chicken or salmon before grilling. • Roll goat cheese over spices for a spread. • Whisk into vinaigrette for green salad.



QUATRE ÉPICES

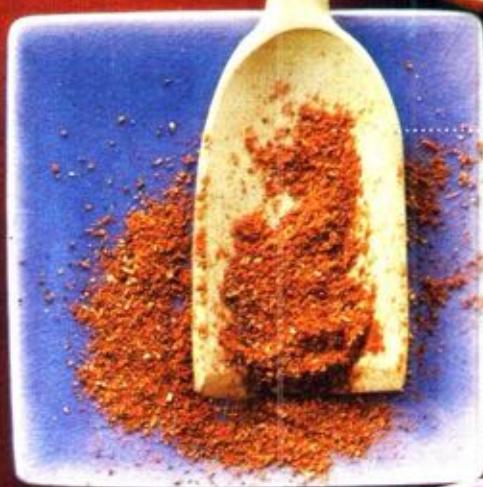
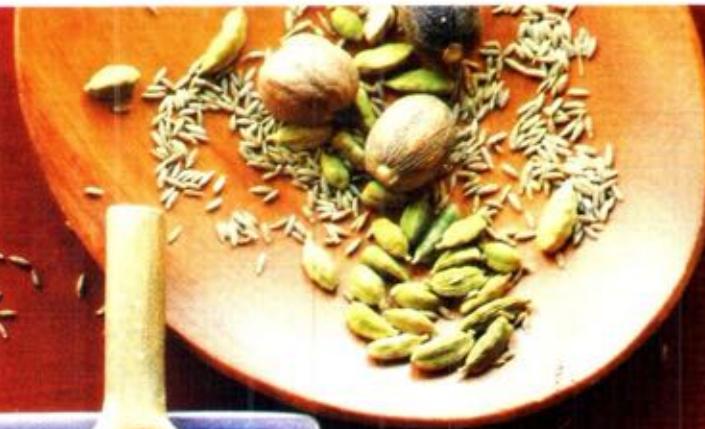
(CAT-re ay-PIECE)
"Four spices" in French

POPULAR IN France.

THE BLEND White or black peppercorns, cloves, ginger, and nutmeg.

FLAVORS Gingerbread spices with a grown-up pepper kick.

TRY THIS Sprinkle over sautéed pork chops and apples. • Blend into meat loaf (quatre épices is traditionally used in pâtés and other charcuterie). • Simmer in chicken stew. • Stir the blend into baked goods or candied nuts.



BAHARAT

(BAH-ha-raht) "Spices" in Arabic

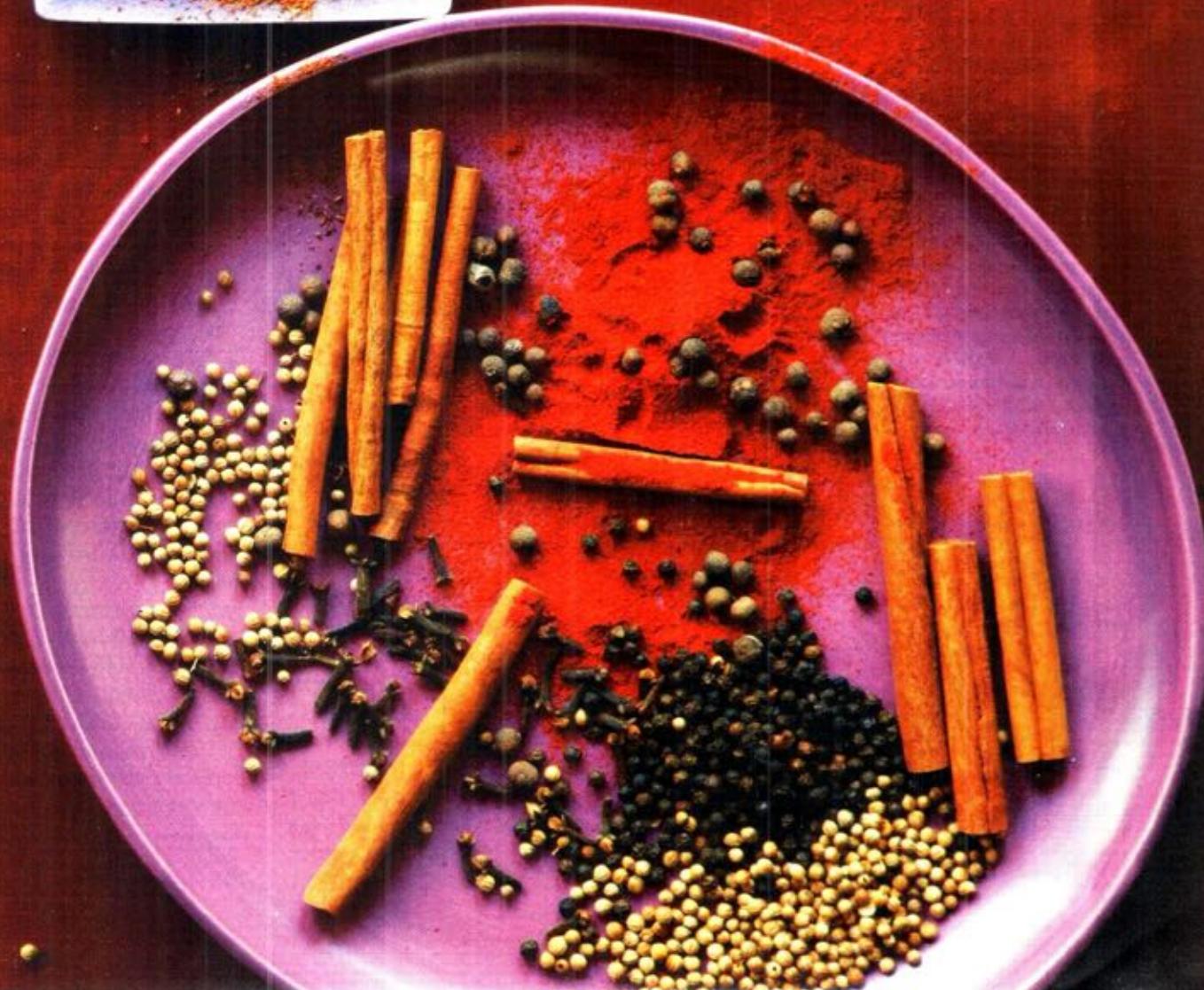
POPULAR IN The Middle East into Turkey.

THE BLEND Allspice, pepper, cinnamon, coriander, nutmeg, cloves, and sometimes cardamom, cumin, and paprika. The Turkish version throws in mint and savory.

FLAVORS Sweet, peppery hot, and tongue-tingling.

TRY THIS Rub over lamb or beef kebabs.

- Stir it into stews, lentils, or pilafs. • Simmer it with a pan of okra. • Sprinkle into tomato sauce or meatballs.



Buy

SPICE SOURCES

Get them at grocery stores, online, and at specialty shops (exact selection varies)

SPICELY Look for little boxes from this Fremont, California, company in many grocery spice aisles West-wide, including Albertsons and Whole Foods Market. spicely.com

SAVORY SPICE SHOP Five Colorado locations (Boulder, Colorado Springs, two in Denver, and Littleton) plus Santa Rosa, California. About 375 spices and house blends, ground weekly. savoryspiceshop.com

WHOLE SPICE Located in Napa, at the Oxbow Public Market. More than 350 spices and housemade blends, ground in small batches each week. wholespice.com

WORLD SPICE MERCHANTS Our holy grail for spices, located just a block from Seattle's Pike Place Market, wows us with a rush of scents worthy of Istanbul's spice bazaar; more than 300 individual spices, including the store's own blends, all ground fresh to order; knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff; and a glass case filled with business cards from chefs who have stopped by to get their fix. worldspice.com

Foodie favorite

WHICH ONE IS ZAATAR?*

Since blends vary by maker, you might want to try several to find your favorite.



*Answer: Both

Make

Stuffed kabocha squash with Arabic lamb stew

SERVES 6 | 3 HOURS

The sweet spices in *baharat* were made for autumn stew.

3 tbsp. olive oil, divided
1 lb. lamb stew meat, cut into 1½-in. chunks
1 tsp. kosher salt, divided
½ tsp. pepper, divided
¾ lb. shallots, peeled, cut in half if large
About 2½ cups reduced-sodium chicken broth, divided
2 tbsp. *baharat*
¼ cup white basmati rice, rinsed
½ cups coarsely chopped tomatoes
1 kabocha squash (3½ to 4 lbs.)
½ tbsp. sliced chives

1. Heat 1 tbsp. oil in a 5- to 6-qt. pan over high heat. Sprinkle lamb with ¾ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper, then brown in oil, stirring occasionally, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer lamb to a bowl and reduce heat under pan to medium-high.
2. Add shallots, 1 tbsp. oil, and ¼ cup broth to pan; stir to loosen browned bits. Cook, stirring occasionally, until shallots are browned, 7 to 10 minutes; add a splash of water if drippings start to get dark. Return meat to pan and sprinkle with *baharat*. Add 2 more cups broth, stirring to loosen browned bits. Cover, bring to

a boil, then reduce heat and simmer 1 hour, adding another ¼ cup broth if pan starts to dry. Stir in rice and tomatoes and return to a boil. Meanwhile, continue with recipe.

3. Preheat oven to 375°. With a short knife, carefully cut around squash stem to make a 4-in. lid. Pry out lid with a table knife. Scrape out and discard seeds from lid and squash. Brush interior of squash and inside of lid with remaining 1 tbsp. oil, then sprinkle them with remaining ¼ tsp. each salt and pepper, tipping squash to coat evenly. Set squash on a rimmed baking sheet. Prick with a fork in a couple of spots near the top.

4. Fill squash with as much stew as fits. Set lid in place, and bake until squash is just tender inside when pierced, 70 minutes to 1½ hours. Meanwhile, spoon remaining stew into a small loaf pan, cover with foil, and bake 1 hour.

5. Stir chives into stew in pan and squash. Transfer squash to a platter with 2 wide spatulas (squash may split a little; this is okay). Use a big metal spoon to scoop out squash and stew into soup bowls, adding stew from pan.

PER SERVING 326 CAL., 33% (109 CAL.) FROM FAT; 22 G PROTEIN; 12 G FAT (3.1 G SAT.); 36 G CARBO (4.5 G FIBER); 542 MG SODIUM; 48 MG CHOL.



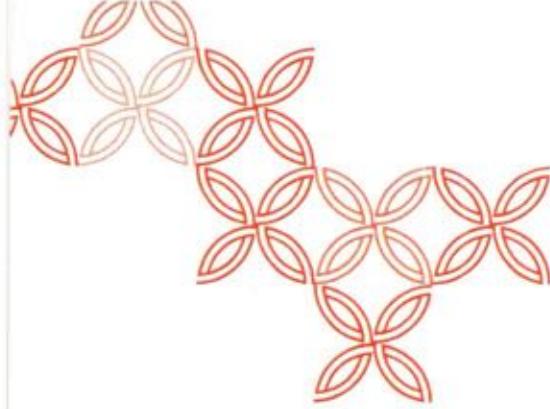
Stuffed kabocha
squash with
Arabic lamb stew



EXPLORE MORE SPICE
BLENDS: sunset.com/spices



Bengali five-spice
roasted chicken and
vegetables



Bengali five-spice roasted chicken and vegetables

SERVES 4 TO 6 | 1 HOUR, PLUS AT LEAST 2 HOURS TO MARINATE

Baked in a very hot oven, the sauce reduces until the panch phoron seeds cling to the chicken and vegetables in chewy nubbins.

2½ tbsp. vegetable oil
2 tbsp. panch phoron
2 dried bay leaves
2½ tbsp. grated fresh ginger
2½ tbsp. minced garlic
2½ tsp. ground coriander
1½ tsp. kosher salt
1¼ cups plain whole-milk yogurt mixed with **1½ tsp.** flour
4 each bone-in chicken legs and thighs (separated; 2 lbs. total)
1 each red and yellow bell peppers, cut into chunks
2 large carrots, quartered lengthwise, cut into 3-in. pieces
1 lb. Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks

1. Heat oil in a small frying pan over medium-high heat. Add panch phoron and cook, stirring, until seeds begin to pop, about 30 seconds. Reduce heat to medium. All at once, add bay leaves, ginger, and garlic; cook, stirring, until ginger softens, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in coriander and salt, and let stand until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add yogurt, stir to loosen browned bits, and let marinade cool.

2. Marinate by putting chicken, bell peppers, and carrots in a 1-gal. resealable plastic bag. Scrape in yogurt mixture, seal, and squish to coat. Chill at least 2 hours or overnight.

3. Bake chicken: Preheat oven to 475° with a rack set in upper third of oven. Put potatoes on a large rimmed baking sheet and squeeze contents of bag over them. Mix to coat, then pat ingredients into a single layer. Bake, turning food with a wide spatula every 15 to 20 minutes and ending with chicken skin side up, until browned, 40 to 45 minutes.

PER SERVING 377 CAL., 45% (171 CAL.) FROM FAT; 25 G PROTEIN; 19 G FAT (4.6 G SAT.); 23 G CARBO (3.2 G FIBER); 595 MG SODIUM; 78 MG CHOL.

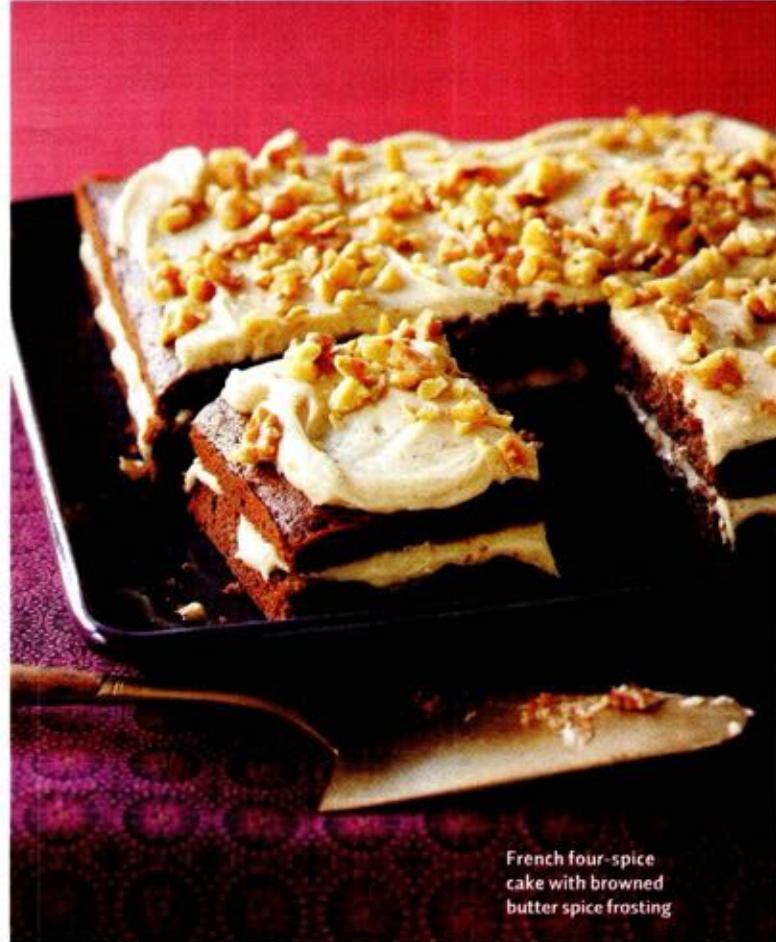
French four-spice cake with browned butter spice frosting

SERVES 12 | 1¾ HOURS

This cake starts out tasting like citrus and sweet spices, then builds to a gentle pepper glow if the *quatre épices* is made with white pepper, or a good kick if it's based on black pepper.

CAKE

½ cup butter, softened
1 cup packed brown sugar
Zest of ½ orange
2 large eggs
1½ cups flour
2 tbsp. unsweetened cocoa
2 tsp. *quatre épices*
1 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. each baking soda and salt
½ cup buttermilk



French four-spice cake with browned butter spice frosting

FROSTING

⅔ cup butter
¼ cup honey
1 tsp. *quatre épices*
2 tbsp. half-and-half
1½ tbsp. lemon juice
3 cups powdered sugar
⅔ cup chopped toasted walnuts

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter and flour a 9-in. square pan.

2. Make cake: Beat butter, brown sugar, and zest in a large bowl with a mixer until fluffy. Add eggs and beat until well blended. In another bowl, combine flour and other dry ingredients. Add flour mixture to butter mixture one-third at a time, alternating with buttermilk half at a time, and beating on low speed after each addition until blended. Spread batter in pan.

3. Bake until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 25 to 30 minutes. Let cool on a rack, 10 minutes. Loosen cake from pan with

a slender spatula, then invert onto a rack. Re-invert onto another rack; cool completely.

4. Make frosting: Cook butter in a medium saucepan over medium-low heat, swirling pan occasionally, until deep golden brown, 10 to 15 minutes. Pour into a mixer bowl, let cool, then chill until firm enough to beat, about 30 minutes. Add remaining ingredients except for nuts and beat until fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes, occasionally scraping inside of bowl.

5. Split cake horizontally with a long serrated knife. Lift off top layer with 2 wide spatulas. Set bottom layer on a platter, then spread with half of frosting. Replace top layer. Spread top of cake with remaining frosting, then sprinkle with nuts.

PER SERVING 490 CAL., 44% (215 CAL.) FROM FAT; 4.5 G PROTEIN; 24 G FAT (13 G SAT.); 68 G CARBO (1.3 G FIBER); 348 MG SODIUM; 85 MG CHOL. ■