

# TODAY'S Woman

Power Style Wellness Connections

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## Spices for Life:

How spices benefit flavor and health  
By Kimberly Crum • Photos by Ewa Wojtkowska

A velvety-yellow sauce blanketed the chicken breast, stiffed and topped with scarlet pomegranate seeds. The entrée (at the Sultan Restaurant in San Francisco) was served with saffron rice, a basket of lentil wafers, and a mint/coriander/red pepper dipping sauce. Each bite of the curried chicken was hot-spicy-savory-sweet-tart-juicy. This surprising mingling of

flavors required frequent nibbles of rice to tamp the spicy heat. A serious gourmand would refer to the flavor of the curry chicken as "piquant," which means "spicy and savory" and "sharply stimulating or provocative." Indeed, my taste buds were pleasantly provoked by the bite of the sauce and the tart crunch of the pomegranate seeds. But what kept me wanting more was the complexity of flavors. This was a dish to savor slowly. Unfortunately, eating slowly is not my custom. I suffer the habit of racing through my daily meals until I am ashamed at how stuffed I have become. As I ate this spicy entrée, with deliberate attention to each bite, I wondered "Would eating flavorful food help me to be a leaner, healthier person?"

TODAY'S Family

TODAY'S Transitions

keep Louisville weird.

Spices are dried, woody, or non-leafy plants indigenous to hot or tropical climates in Asia and South America. Their aromatic counterparts, herbs, are from leafy plants that grow naturally in Europe and the Mediterranean. Spices can be hot. But they are more often sweet, pungent, fruity, nutty, lemony, woody, peppery or bitter. According to Julie Sahni, in her deliciously informative cookbook *Savoring Spices and Herbs*, spices are sensual aromatics used for thousands of years to enhance "flavor, aroma, coloring and bite." The co-proprietor of a 50-year "mom and pop" operation, The Spice House ([spices@thespicehouse.com](mailto:spices@thespicehouse.com)), describes her reverence for these flavor enhancers in a friendly reply to my email. According to Patty Erd, "Spices have histories that tie into the discovery of our Earth, wars were fought for them, people used them in religious ceremonies, for embalming, for preserving food throughout the winter months, as aphrodisiacs, to deodorize a room, as currency, for dowries...we could go on and on!" The Spice House imports whole spices from around the world, and grinds them just before shipping, because spices are at most aromatic when freshly ground. Its Spice House web site also offers a plethora of recipes for the home cook.

Louisville has its own local flavor innovator, Matt Jamie — a chef whose company, Bourbon Barrel Foods, produces bourbon-smoked paprika, pepper and sea-salt as well as soy and Worcestershire sauce. Jamie uses Kentucky ingredients: sorghum, soybeans, wheat and bourbon barrels. His goal is to provide "products that reflect the rich heritage of Kentucky's bourbon country — The Napa Valley of the Bluegrass." Jamie's smoked paprika and pepper smell like exotic campfires and provide rich flavor to foods. In the spring, he will release a spice rub that includes chocolate. In addition to being calorie-free flavor enhancers, spices are healthful. Most are digestives. Many contain antioxidants, are anti-microbial, and of have anti-inflammatory properties. Ginger prevents morning sickness; cinnamon stops the growth of bacteria and reduces blood glucose and cholesterol; red pepper suppresses appetite; sage promotes memory; turmeric might prevent cancer. The active ingredient in turmeric is being used in research studies to treat Alzheimer's disease and cancer at university medical institutions such as Emory, Johns Hopkins, University of Michigan, UCLA and M.D. Anderson.

In spite of health benefits, our spice cabinets will never become medicine cabinets. You'd have to ingest six grams of cinnamon each day in order to reduce blood glucose and cholesterol. Few people would want to eat a spoon of ground cinnamon or one cup of curry powder each day. And daily doses of apple pie and cinnamon toast, or curried chicken, might seem like too much of a good thing.

For those of us who want the benefits of disease prevention, homeopathic physicians, chemists and pharmacists have created supplements that are extracts of the active ingredients in spices. One such company, New Chapter ([newchapter.com](http://newchapter.com)) manufactures such supplements as Daily Ginger, Turmeric Force, and Cinnamon Force, available at health food stores and on the web site.

Disease prevention is a lofty goal. But spices can provide more immediate satisfaction. I remember my mother's Hungarian Goulash as an example of how fragrance and flavor at the communal table can create a pleasant olfactory memory. Sometimes I cook Hungarian Goulash simply to smell the meaty exotic melding of the paprika and marjoram simmering in a rich scarlet tomato and butter-based sauce. In my opinion, spices can create a sense of well-being: the pleasure and satisfaction that come from sharing the flavor and aroma of food at the table with people you love.

**SPICE TIPS:** • A sprinkling of nutmeg or cardamom brings out the natural sweetness of foods.

- A pinch of cumin or ginger on beans makes them more digestible.
- Caraway seeds sprinkled on potatoes makes complex starch easier to digest.
- A dash of turmeric during cooking will enhance the green in vegetables.
- Grinding whole spices (like peppercorns, red peppers, and clove) in a spice grinder will increase flavor and aroma.
- Dispose of bottles of spice when they are a year old.

#### PRISCILLA'S HUNGARIAN GOULASH

2 tsp marjoram  
1 tsp caraway seeds  
1 tsp finely chopped lemon rind  
1 clove garlic, chopped  
3/4 Cup butter  
1/2 can tomato paste  
2 Tablespoon paprika  
1 Cup diced onions  
2 lbs. top sirloin beef cubed  
1 Cup hot water  
2 beef bouillon cubes

In a large heavy pan, melt butter, add paste and blend in all seasonings EXCEPT paprika. Add onions and sauté. Then add paprika. Put two bouillon cubes into one cup of boiling water. Add beef. Simmer 1 1/2 hours, stirring frequently. Add water as needed. Cover partially so liquid can reduce. Serve with broccoli and egg noodles or corkscrew noodles.

#### BOURBON BARREL BISON CHILI

Provided by Chef Matt Jamie of Bourbon Barrel Foods

2 pounds of ground bison  
1/2 cup Bourbon Barrel Aged Worcestershire Sauce  
1 sweet onion diced finely  
1 bay leaf  
3 1/2 Tablespoons paprika  
1 Tablespoon of cracked black pepper  
1/2 Tablespoon Bourbon Smoked Sea Salt  
2/3 tsp cumin seed  
1/2 tsp crushed chilies

1/4 tsp cinnamon  
1/8 tsp each of clove, white pepper, turmeric,  
2 8-ounce cans of tomato sauce

Brown meat in heavy stock pot. Add Bourbon Barrel Aged Worcestershire Sauce. Stir in onions and spices. Cook for 2-3 minutes.  
Add tomato sauce. Adjust salt & pepper.

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