October's Spice of the Month

Cumin

Cumin is a spice made from the dried seed of a plant known as *Cuminum cyminum*, which is a member of the parsley family. It's an ancient spice grown in Egypt and the Middle East. In fact, it has been found in 4,000-year-old excavations in Syria and ancient Egypt used as both a cooking spice and for mummification purposes. Cumin also appears in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Since ancient times, cumin has been used in India and by the Greeks and Romans, making its way into various cuisines all around the world.
Whole Vs. Ground

Both whole and ground cumin are used in cooking. Whole seeds are often featured in Indian dishes, often added to hot oil at the beginning of cooking to infuse the oil and add flavor to the rest of the ingredients. Lightly roasted whole seeds over a pan will bring out the full cumin flavor. Whole seeds can be kept in the freezer over a long period to maintain their flavor.

Ground cumin does not need heat or time for the flavor to be released. However, once the seeds are ground, the cumin will gradually lose its flavor over time and should be replaced regularly. Ground cumin should be stored in a cool, dark place and will last up to 6 months.

Health Benefits

In India, Cumin seeds are often chewed as a digestive aid, typically offered at the end of a meal for this purpose. Cumin is also high in iron and contains many phytonutrients and antioxidants, as well.

Cooking Uses

Cooking with cumin will depend on whether the recipe calls for whole or ground cumin. As a rule of thumb, however, remember that whole cumin has a more potent flavor. So, if switching from whole to ground cumin and vice versa, be sure to portion correctly.

Whole cumin seeds should be included early in the recipe in order for the spice to release its essence. Adding whole seeds to hot broth or oil will let the flavors disperse into the dish. Ground cumin is more

commonly used and is a staple in most curry powders and many spice blends.

Buttermilk Squash Soup Recipe

For this deeply satisfying soup use yellow summer squash here, but you can certainly substitute any green summer squash/zucchini. A version with peas - also good with the cumin butter. And while we're on the topic, it's nice to have the cumin brown butter on hand, so if you think it sounds like something you might like, make a double or triple batch of it.

1 teaspoon cumin seeds = 3/4 of ground cumin
1/4 cup / 2 oz / 55g unsalted butter
fine grain sea salt

3 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 medium yellow onions, chopped
2 medium garlic cloves

1 pound / 16 oz / 450 g potatoes, cut into 1/4-inch cubes

2 1/2 pounds / 40 oz / 1+kg yellow summer squash, cut into 1/2-inch slices

4 cups / 950 ml good tasting vegetable stock
1 cup / 240 ml buttermilk
1 bunch of chives, chopped

In a skillet, over medium heat, toast the cumin seeds until they are fragrant. Just a minute or two. Use a mortar and pestle to pound the seeds into a fine powder. Alternatively, you can use an electric spice grinder. Set aside. In the same skillet, melt the butter and cook until it's brown and gives off a deliciously nutty aroma. Remove from heat, stir the cumin into the butter along with a generous couple pinches of salt, then set aside in a warm place. You want the butter to stay liquid until you're ready to use it.

To make the soup, heat the butter in your largest pot or stockpot over medium-high heat. Add the onions, garlic, and a bit of salt. Saute for a few minutes, or until the onions start to get

translucent. Stir in the potatoes and squash and cook for another 7-10 minutes, or until the squash starts to soften up. Stir in 3 1/2 cups of the stock (most of it) - the stock should just barely cover the vegetables. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook until the potatoes are tender, roughly another 25 minutes. Remove the soup from heat, puree completely with a hand blender, then stir in the buttermilk. If you need to thin the soup out with a bit more stock, you can do so. Taste and add more salt if needed. Serve each bowl topped with plenty of the cumin butter, and a sprinkling of chives.

Serves 10.

Source: 101 Cookbooks

Lamb Loin Chops with Red Wine Pan Sauce with Cumin and Chiles

Toasty cumin and piquant chiles, offset with fresh cilantro and lime zest, balance bold red wine in this quick pan sauce.

Total Time: 15 mins
Servings: 4
Ingredients

8 (1/2-inch-thick) lamb loin chops (about 2 pounds, fatty tips trimmed)
Kosher salt, to taste
Black pepper, to taste
3 tablespoons neutral oil (such as grapeseed)
1 to 2 tablespoons finely chopped red Fresno chile or jalapeño chile (from 1 medium [3/4 oz.] chile, seeded if desired)
2 medium garlic cloves, finely chopped (about 2 teaspoons)
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
1/3 cup bold red wine (such as Rioja or Bordeaux)
1 cup beef stock or lower-sodium beef broth
2 tablespoons cold unsalted butter
3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

1/2 teaspoon grated lime zest plus 1 tablespoon fresh juice (from 1 lime)

Directions

Season the lamb with salt and pepper. In a very large skillet, heat the oil until it shimmers. Add the lamb chops and cook over moderately high heat until the chops are browned on the bottom, about 3 minutes. Turn the chops and cook until the chops are browned, about 2 minutes longer for medium meat. Transfer the chops to plates and tent to keep warm. Discard all but 1 tablespoon of drippings.

Heat reserved drippings in skillet over medium-high. Add chile and garlic; cook, stirring constantly, until softened, about 20 seconds. Add cumin; cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Add red wine (mixture will immediately come to a simmer). Simmer over medium-high, stirring occasionally to loosen browned bits on the bottom of the skillet, until liquid has reduced by about half, 1 to 2 minutes. Add stock; cook, stirring occasionally, until mixture has reduced to about 3/4 cup and just barely coats the back of a spoon, 4 to 6 minutes. Reduce heat to low; add butter to mixture, stirring until just melted, about 30 seconds. Remove from heat. Stir in cilantro, lime zest, and lime juice. Season to taste with salt and black pepper. Serve the red wine pan sauce with the lamb chops.

Source: Food & Wine