

Did You Know?



Cloves, *Syzygium aromaticum*

- Cloves are the fragrant unopened flower buds of a tree native to the Maluku Islands (the Spice Islands) in Indonesia, though are now grown for commercial cultivation in Zanzibar, Sri Lanka, Madagascar, the West Indies, India, Pemba Island, and Brazil.
- The harvested clove consists of the unopened flower bud, ripened to a red color, that sits on four sepals just above the long calyx.
- The intensely fragrant clove is dried until it is hard and brown. It resembles a small nail or tack.
- The fragrance of cloves can be described as sweet and spicy with hot and fruity qualities. The fragrance was used to improve eyesight. Modern aromatherapy includes cloves to lift spirits, provide comfort, stimulate the mind and boost memory.
- Cloves were used in herb mixtures and pomanders (oranges studded with cloves) to protect folks from the street odors as well as to ward off the plague and other air-borne diseases in the Middle Ages. Pomanders were also used to discourage moths and other insects when hung in a closet or tucked inside drawers.
- Cloves are said to have been part of Four Thieves Vinegar which was used to protect grave robbers during the 15th Century plague.
- Cloves were used medicinally in early civilizations including Chinese, Indian and Roman healers.
- Today, clove oil is known to have antibacterial, antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties.
- Used in cuisines around the world, including these spice blends: Chinese five spice, garam masala from India, ras el hanout from Morocco, quatre epices from France, and blended with cinnamon and cumin in Mexico.
- Culinary uses include beverages, sweet and savory dishes.
- Courtiers in 200 B.C.E China would put cloves in their mouths to freshen their breath before addressing the emperor so as not to offend him.

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