

# Today's Diet & Nutrition

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# Masala Medicine

Chef Hari Nayak sings the praises of spices and shares spicy recipes from his new book, *My Indian Kitchen*.

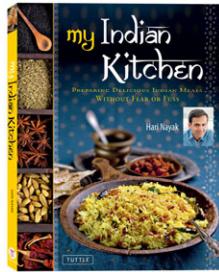
Indian cooking is all about spices and flavor—the two are one and the same in the Indian cook's kitchen. To master Indian cooking is to understand how to use spices singly and in combination to enhance food.

India, since ancient times, has been considered the home of spices. There, spices such as black pepper, turmeric, and cardamom have been prized for centuries—so much so they were once valued as highly as gold. Historic accounts relate how people followed the trails of early merchants in their search for spices, how indigenous spices were traded, and how spices came to be considered royal luxuries.

Exotic, aromatic, and exciting spices add piquancy, tang, and fiery flavor to food. A mixture of certain spices or herbs is known as a masala—a unique combination that creates the distinctive tastes in each recipe.

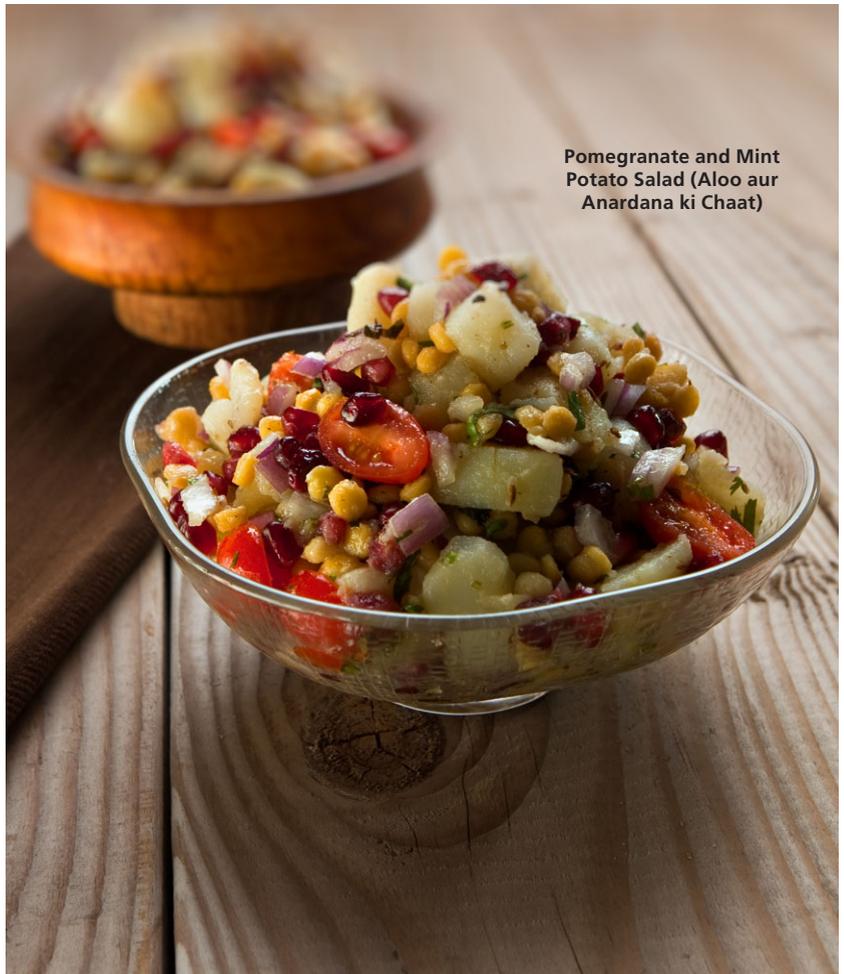
While studies have confirmed that many flavor-enhancing ingredients do more than please our palates—for example many have preservative, antibiotic, and therapeutic benefits—not all of the health benefits associated with spices have been verified. Here are a few basic spices that can add flavor, texture, heat, and color to dishes, along with the ways in which they're believed to boost health.

● **Turmeric:** Studies suggest that turmeric (also known as the king of spices), with its anti-inflammatory properties, may play a role in slowing



the progression of Alzheimer's disease and help bring relief to arthritis sufferers. The spice contains curcumin, an antioxidant believed to inhibit the growth of cancer cells and help detoxify the liver. The latest scientific studies show that turmeric may also be a promising diet aid that fights belly fat by inhibiting the growth of fat cells.

● **Cinnamon:** Cinnamon is known to lower blood sugar, triglycerides, and total cholesterol in people with type 2 diabetes. This spice is a rich source of antioxidants, has anti-inflammatory properties, and eases digestion. It also helps stimulate blood



Pomegranate and Mint Potato Salad (Aloo aur Anardana ki Chaat)

flow and is used as a remedy for poor circulation.

- **Garlic:** Garlic is a potent remedy that not only attacks infections directly but works to bolster and stimulate the body's immune system. It's also said to help destroy cancer cells and may disrupt the metabolism of tumor cells. Some studies suggest that consuming one or two cloves weekly provides cancer-protective benefits.

- **Chile powder:** Chile powder contains capsaicin, which has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects that may lower the risk of cancer. Chile has been associated with everything from pain relief, reduced congestion, and the prevention of stomach ulcers to weight loss and improved cardiovascular health. There's no recommended dose, but moderation in consumption may be beneficial.

- **Ginger:** Ginger has many proven uses. It's a natural treatment for nausea, morning sickness, and motion sickness, and its anti-inflammatory properties help ease muscle and joint pain. Since it has a diaphoretic effect (causes sweating), it is used to cleanse and detoxify the body, stimulate circulation, and ease bronchitis and congestion.

- **Fenugreek:** Like many of the other herbs and spices used in Indian cooking, ground fenugreek seeds have anti-inflammatory properties and aid digestion. Fenugreekine, a chemical found in these seeds, is believed to reduce blood sugar levels and has been used as a natural supplement to regulate insulin levels. Fenugreek is also a potent expectorant and is used as a remedy for congestion, allergies, and bronchitis.

- **Cloves:** The active compounds in cloves are responsible for antibacterial and antifungal effects. Cloves also demonstrate anti-inflammatory properties and have been studied for their ability to combat the effects of environmental pollutants.



Yellow Mung Beans With Spinach (Dal Palak)

- **Coriander:** The seed of the cilantro plant, coriander contains antioxidants that help keep animal fats from becoming rancid and has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. It also helps soothe the stomach and relieve bloating, and coriander oil is used as a natural remedy for arthritis. A good source of dietary fiber, iron, and magnesium, coriander may help reduce cholesterol levels.

- **Cumin:** Cumin, a source of iron, is said to aid digestion and has been linked to cancer prevention. As a traditional herbal remedy, it's used as a diuretic (helps the body shed water) and to relieve diarrhea and bowel spasms, morning sickness, and the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome.

- **Bay leaf:** Bay leaves contain compounds that have been helpful for the treatment of migraines, which could explain its traditional use as a natural headache remedy. They also contain anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, explaining their use in herbal cold remedies.

- **Cardamom:** This versatile spice, used in a wide range of dishes from Indian curries to desserts and teas, is believed to counteract stomach acidity, stimulate appetite, ease nausea, cure bad breath, and relieve gas and bloating. Cardamom has also been used as an aphrodisiac.

— Hari Nayak



## Salmon Kebabs

Skewered minced fish on a stick is not very common in Indian cooking. This is my twist on minced meat kebabs that are popular in India. This dish makes a very elegant presentation and is a good choice for a cocktail party. Fresh coriander (cilantro) adds a delicate citrusy fragrance to this delicious salmon dish.

Serves 4

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 15 minutes

**1¼ lbs salmon fillets, skinned**

**3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh coriander leaves (cilantro)**

**1 tablespoon garam masala powder**

**2 fresh green chili peppers, minced**

**1 to 2 tablespoons dried breadcrumbs**

**8 bamboo skewers, soaked in water for 30 minutes**

**2 tablespoons oil**

**Chutney of your choice, for serving**

**1.** Chop the salmon meat by using a knife or a food processor, being careful not to pulverize the meat. In a bowl, mix together the salmon meat, fresh coriander leaves, garam masala powder and green chilis and 1 tablespoon of the breadcrumbs. Take about ¼ cup of the mixture and, with moistened hands, form a little patty directly onto a skewer, leaving about 1 inch open on either end. Firmly press the salmon mixture onto a skewer. This is your test skewer. If the test patty adhered to the skewer, follow Step 2, but divide the dough into 7 equal portions instead of 8. If the patty does not adhere to the skewer, remove the patty from the skewer and return it to the bowl with the rest of salmon mixture. Sprinkle on additional tablespoon of breadcrumbs and thoroughly mix in.

**2.** Divide the mixture into 8 equal portions (or 7 portions, if the test patty worked). Using your hands, with your palms slightly wet, form a little patty directly onto a skewer. (Make sure the patties are firmly attached to the skewers before putting them onto the preheated and oiled pan.)

**3.** Preheat a large, shallow skillet over medium heat. Add the oil. When hot, place the skewers in the skillet.

**4.** Cook the skewers until the salmon is just cooked through, about 2 to 3 minutes per side. Remove the skewers from the pan and serve immediately with the chutney of your choice.

**TD&N Nutrient Analysis:** Calories: 329; Total Fat: 22 g; Saturated Fat: 5 g; Polyunsaturated Fat: 5 g; Monounsaturated Fat: 11 g; Cholesterol: 71 mg; Sodium: 81 mg; Carbohydrates: 3 g; Fiber: 0 g; Protein: 29 g

*Recipe used with permission from My Indian Kitchen: Preparing Delicious Indian Meals Without Fear or Fuss by Hari Nayak, [www.tuttlepublishing.com](http://www.tuttlepublishing.com)*