

Herbs vs. Spices: What's the Difference?

by Stephanie Pradun, RD, LDN, TRIO Registered Dietitian

Herbs and spices can be a healthy salt-free option to add flavor and color to your favorite recipes. Though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, the main difference is in the source.

Herbs and spices come from different parts of the plant

Herbs come from the green, leafy parts of the plant. They can be fresh or dried and are usually more delicate or subtle than spices. Spices can use the root, stem, seed, flower, or bark of the tree or plant. Some plants, like cilantro, produce both an herb (cilantro leaves) and a spice (coriander seeds).

Shelf life of herbs and spices

Spices and dried herbs lose their potency over time, so it's best to use them within a year. Store in sealed containers away from light and heat. Whole spices (cinnamon sticks, cloves, etc) keep their flavor longer than ground spices, so you could consider grinding your own spices in a spice or coffee grinder for optimal freshness.

Fresh herbs have a much shorter shelf life. Extend the shelf life by placing upright in a glass of water in the refrigerator or grow a live plant to harvest when needed.

Stock a basic and versatile pantry

You don't need a huge assortment of spices or herbs to enjoy delicious meals at home. Keep a small variety of essentials that can be used in many types of dishes:

Black pepper or peppercorns, cayenne pepper, chili powder, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, curry powder, garlic powder, ground ginger, kosher salt, nutmeg, dried oregano, smoked paprika, dried rosemary, & dried thyme.

Our menus include a variety of foods to provide you with well-balanced meals, which are lower in fat and sodium and offer the choice of a diabetic friendly dessert.

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