

## KITCHEN TALK: Maximize Flavor with Good Quality Spices

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**When is the last time you checked or even thought about the freshness of your spices?**

**When you purchased a container last year?**

**When you checked it months ago in your pantry?**

**Never?**

**Well, you're not alone!**

It's easy to assume that when a new container of spice is purchased that all is well - it will make any dish wonderfully flavored and will last forever, right? As it turns out, that may not be the case. Not all spices available on the market are created equal so the cooking and keeping results can vary greatly. Since spices play a leading role in cooking, it's important to start with the best quality products that you can. Keying into the purchase a bit more and checking them periodically will reap big rewards at the dinner table.

To get started, here are **5 TIPS** to help select high quality spices that will infuse maximum flavor into your cooking.

### 1. SHOP

Check local ethnic markets, farmers markets, health-focused stores, specialty grocers, co-ops, spice shops and producers for high quality spices. Sadly, many grocers and gift shops stock products that are not very fresh and are of poor quality. Find a source that has quick turn-over and takes pride in quality. For example, some sources from which I regularly purchase include - [Penzy's](#), [Whole Foods](#), local co-ops, a specialty food retailer called [Golden Fig Fine Foods](#), and farmers market vendors.



*Photo: Calum Lewis on Unsplash*

### 2. BUY SMALL

Buy small amounts but avoid bulk bins and containers. First, smaller quantities provide an opportunity to evaluate the quality, and second, it keeps your supply turning over faster and, therefore, fresher. Large jars may seem like a good deal per ounce but they won't be when they go stale before you are able to use them or are already stale at the time of purchase.

### 3. CONSIDER BUYING WHOLE

Consider buying whole spices (seeds, nuts, pods, sticks or roots) and grinding, grating, slicing or chopping them yourself, depending on the use and recipe. Good quality ground spices are available and I use them regularly, but just like with anything less processed, whole spices do stay fresher longer and maintain more nutrient value. Think about the difference in ground black pepper that comes out of the large tin container vs. fresh ground peppercorns. Or freshly grated cinnamon stick or ginger root vs. the ground version from a jar that has been sitting for a year or longer.

No spice grinder? I recommend [Krupps Electric Spice and Coffee Grinder](#). It's inexpensive, provides a nice, even grind and is easy to use and clean. Keep it just for grinding spices, not coffee beans.

### 4. USE YOUR SENSES

Allow your senses to guide you when selecting spices -

- Sight - Look for uniform, intense and, in many cases, vibrant color; avoid faded or grey.
- Smell - An intense, herb, spicy or plant-like aroma is a good sign.

- Taste - Not all spices taste pleasant when they are raw, so sample both raw and in cooked dishes. Are they flavorful or dull and flat? Do you taste the flavor in the cooked dish or is it lacking?

## 5. STORE PROPERLY

Store spices in tightly sealed containers in a cool, dry, dark space. Label the container with a purchase date to at least give you an indication of how long you've had it.

## RESOURCES:

For more in-depth reading on spices, check out any of these books -

- [The Spice Companion: A Guide to the World of Spices](#) by Lior Lev Sercarz
- [Mastering Spice: Recipes and Techniques to Transform Your Everyday Cooking](#) by Lior Lev Sercarz
- [Spiced: Unlock the Power of Spices to Transform Your Cooking](#) by Americas Test Kitchen