

Module- 01: Introduction

1.1. Introduction:

Spices can be defined as the dry part of a plant, such as roots, leaves, bark, fruits, flowers and seeds which are used as food adjuncts to add aroma and flavour to food products while condiments are also plant parts which are used as food adjuncts to add taste only. The flavour and taste attributes come into the foods due to the presence of essential oils in spices and condiments. These may be used as whole, ground, paste or liquid form for flavouring and seasoning foods.

1.2. Characteristics of spice:

- They are usually dried and ground to be mixed with other ingredients.
- They are having carminative properties, thus stimulate digestion.
- They add flavour and aesthetic, aromatic and therapeutic treatments to food, drink and other items.
- Dry varieties increase the shelf life of food.
- They are having antibiotic properties and prevent bacterial growth.
- They preserve food like meat for year or more without refrigeration.
- Some varieties improve texture while some introduce palatable colour or odour.
- They are of little nutritive value.

1.3. Classification of spices

There are about 35 spices and condiments which can be broadly classified into 6 groups, based upon the parts of the plants from which they are obtained:

a. Rhizomes and root spices: Ginger, Turmeric, and Garlic.

b. Seed spices: Nutmeg, Coriander, Fennel, Cumin, Fenugreek, Dill, Aniseed, Celery and Bishop-weed.

c. Bark spices: Cinnamon.

d. Fruit spices: Cardamom, Black Pepper, Vanilla, All spice, Cassia, Tamarind, etc.

e. Leaf spices: Bay leaf, Curry leaf, etc.

f. Flower spices: Clove, Saffron, Asafoetida, etc.

Generally, spices are the primary ingredients used in dishes during their preparation, while condiments are used at the table to enhance the taste of the dish. In other words, spices are the main ingredients used during the preparation of a dish to impart flavour, aroma and piquancy to the foods while condiments are the secondary ingredients that are used after the dish is prepared and adds only taste to the dish e.g., ketchup.

Spices and condiments are major commercial crop in India and earn a major part of foreign exchange annually. They have been the backbone of agricultural industry. The importance of spices and condiment in dietary, medicinal and other uses, and their commercial importance are immense.

Spices undergo following processing before consumption:

- spice cleaning,
- spice reconditioning ,
- spice grinding and
- Spice packaging

1.4. Types of spices:

1.4.1. Turmeric



It is a rhizomatous herb plant of the ginger family. It is one of the key ingredients for many Indian, Persian and Thai dishes such as in curry and many more.

1.4.2. Cardamom



Cardamom refers to several plants of the similar genera Elettaria and Amomum in the ginger family. Cardamom is native to India. Cardamom was used as a medicine as well as a food. It became common in Europe in the 17th century when it was brought by sea from India. Cardamom is used as flavourings in both food and drink.

1.4.3. Chilli



Chillies are native to South and Central America and they have been cultivated for thousands of years. However in the 16th century they were introduced into South Asia and Southern Europe by the Spanish and Portuguese. Chilli powder became very popular in Britain in the 19th century.

1.4.4. Cinnamon



Cinnamon is a spice obtained from the inner bark of several trees from the genus *Cinnamomum* that is used in both sweet and savoury foods. Cinnamon bark is widely used as a spice. It is principally employed in

cooking as a condiment and flavouring material. Cinnamon is native to Sri Lanka. Like many spices cinnamon was used as a medicine as well as a food. It was used to treat many complaints including colds and flu.

1.4.5. Cloves



Cloves are the aromatic dried flower buds of a tree in the family Myrtaceae. Cloves are native to the Maluku islands in Indonesia and used as a spice in cuisines all over the world. Cloves are harvested primarily in Indonesia, India, Madagascar, Zanzibar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. They have a numbing effect on mouth tissues. Cloves are native to Indonesia but they were known to the Romans and to the Ancient Chinese. Cloves were also used as a medicine. Cloves are now grown in East Africa and in Brazil.

1.4.6. Coriander



Coriander also called cilantro or dhania, is an annual herb in the family *Apiaceae*. Coriander is native to southern Europe and North Africa to south-western Asia. All parts of the plant are edible, but the fresh leaves and the dried seeds are the parts most commonly used in cooking. Coriander is common in South Asian, Middle Eastern, Central Asian, Mediterranean, and Indian dishes. Coriander was grown by the Greeks and the Romans. It was also popular in Medieval Europe. For centuries coriander was used as a medicine and it was believed to be an aphrodisiac.

1.4.7. Cumin



Cumin is a flowering plant in the family *Apiaceae*, native from the east Mediterranean to India. Its seeds are used in the cuisines of many different cultures, in both whole and ground form. Cumin seeds are used as a spice for their distinctive flavour and aroma. It is globally popular and an essential flavouring in many cuisines. Cumin is native to the Mediterranean region and it was well known in Ancient Egypt as well as in Greece and Rome. Cumin was also a common spice in the middle Ages in Europe. It was also used as a medicine.

1.4.8. *Garlic*



Garlic is native to Central Asia. It was known in Ancient Egypt and also in India and China. Garlic was also grown by the Greeks and the Romans. For centuries garlic was used as a medicine as it is a strong antiseptic. Garlic was also believed to be an aphrodisiac. It originates in Yunnan province in Southern China.

1.4.9. *Ginger*



Ginger or ginger root is the rhizome of the plant *Zingiber officinale*, consumed as a delicacy, medicine, or spice. It lends its name to its genus and family (Zingiberaceae). Young ginger rhizomes are juicy and fleshy with a very mild taste. Ginger is native to Southeast Asia. It was known in ancient China and India and from the Middle Ages was used in Europe. However for centuries ginger was used as a medicine far more than for flavouring food.

1.4.10. *Mint*



It is a popular herb in Europe in the middle ages. Like many herbs mint was used as a medicine as well as a food. It was well known to the ancient Greeks and Romans.

1.4.11. *Mustard*



It was well known in the ancient Middle East and it is mentioned in the bible. The Romans also grew mustard and they introduced it into the parts of Europe they conquered.

1.4.12. *Nutmeg*



Nutmeg and mace have similar sensory qualities, with nutmeg having a slightly sweeter and mace a more delicate flavour. Mace is often preferred in light dishes for the bright orange, saffron-like hue it imparts. Nutmeg is used for flavouring many dishes, usually in ground or grated form, and is

best grated fresh in a nutmeg grater. Nutmeg comes from Indonesia. It is having many medicinal uses.

1.4.13. Soya sauce



Soy sauce is a condiment produced by fermenting soybeans with *Aspergillus oryzae* mold, along with water and salt. Soy sauce is a traditional ingredient in East and Southeast Asian cuisines, where it is used in cooking and as a condiment. In more recent times, it is also used in Western cuisine and prepared foods.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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