



Spice of Life

To make your cooking ever more flavorful—and healthful—just look in the spice cabinet. BY ELLIE KRIEGER



“Thinking about how to combine antioxidant powerhouses in one delicious dish led me straight to this vegetable curry.”

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, looking into my mother’s spice cabinet was like dreaming in black and white. Salt and pepper were the dominant seasonings, with maybe a handful of others. I recall some garlic powder, onion flakes, cinnamon-sugar for my favorite toast, and the same old jar of paprika that had been there for decades, mainly to garnish deviled eggs for parties.

It wasn’t until I grew up that I discovered the glorious, vast array of spices out there and began to see food and flavor in brilliant Technicolor. I remember the first time I had smoked paprika, served on potatoes in a Spanish restaurant. I ran to the market to buy my own jar the next day. (It was tough to find back then; now it’s everywhere.) My first attempt at chili from scratch brought cumin, coriander, and ancho chile powder into my life. And while sugary cinnamon toast is still one of my ultimate comfort foods, learning how cinnamon can transform savory dishes came as a revelation.

Spices continue to surprise and impress me, since the latest research reveals their immense antioxidant power. Astoundingly, a half-teaspoon of that good old cinnamon has more antioxidants than a serving of raspberries; a half-teaspoon of ground turmeric, more than a serving of broccoli. Ground ginger, curry powder, and paprika are also

top antioxidant scorers. All of this translates into big potential healing power. For example, studies link cinnamon with blood sugar regulation, turmeric with cancer prevention, and ginger with reducing inflammation. To think I’ve loved these spices simply for their flavor.

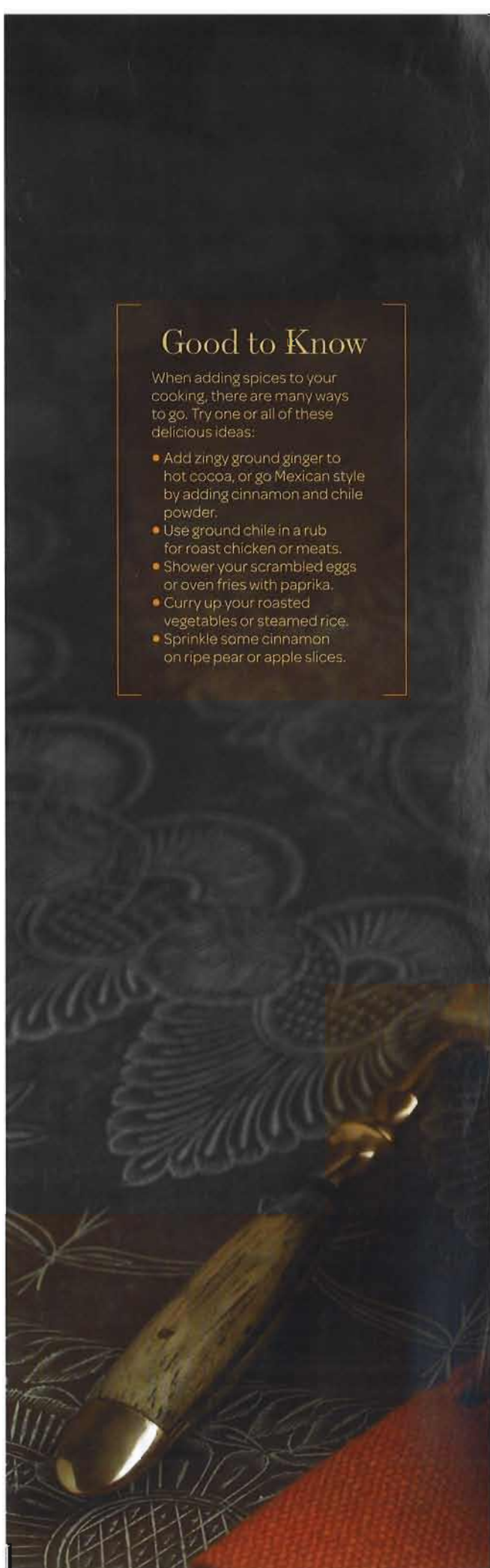
Given the health benefits, there’s even more reason to spice things up in the kitchen. Thinking about how to combine several antioxidant powerhouses—turmeric, cinnamon, cayenne—in one delicious dish led me straight to this vegetable curry. Here, the spices marry in a rich, flavorful sauce that has a comforting, belly-warming appeal and brings out the complex flavors in the vegetables. They’re everyday vegetables made extraordinary and even more healthful—thanks to my Technicolor spice cabinet.

Good to Know

When adding spices to your cooking, there are many ways to go. Try one or all of these delicious ideas:

- Add zingy ground ginger to hot cocoa, or go Mexican style by adding cinnamon and chile powder.
- Use ground chile in a rub for roast chicken or meats.
- Shower your scrambled eggs or oven fries with paprika.
- Curry up your roasted vegetables or steamed rice.
- Sprinkle some cinnamon on ripe pear or apple slices.

Photographs by Scott Phillips; food styling by Samantha Seneviratne



south indian-style vegetable curry

This easy one-pot meatless main gets complex flavor from a combination of spices, including coriander, cumin, turmeric, cayenne, and cinnamon. Serve with basmati rice.

Serves 6

- 2 Tbs. canola oil
- 1 large yellow onion, finely diced
- 4 medium cloves garlic, minced
- 1 2-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and finely grated (1 Tbs.)
- 1 Tbs. ground coriander
- 1½ tsp. ground cumin
- ¾ tsp. ground turmeric
- ½ tsp. cayenne
- 1 Tbs. tomato paste
- 2 cups lower-salt chicken broth or vegetable broth
- 1 cup light coconut milk
- 1 3-inch cinnamon stick
- Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 small cauliflower, broken into 1½-inch florets (about 4 cups)

- 1 lb. sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes (about 3 cups)
- 2 medium tomatoes, cored, seeded, and coarsely chopped (about 1½ cups)
- 2 large carrots, peeled and cut into ½-inch-thick rounds (about 1 cup)
- 1 15½-oz. can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 4 oz. baby spinach (about 4 lightly packed cups)
- 2 Tbs. fresh lime juice
- 1 tsp. finely grated lime zest
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro

In a 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven or other heavy-duty pot, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until beginning to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium (or medium low if necessary) and cook until the onion is richly browned, 5 to 7 minutes more. Add the garlic and ginger; cook, stirring, for 1 minute to

blend the flavors. Add the coriander, cumin, turmeric, and cayenne; stir for 30 seconds to toast the spices. Add the tomato paste and stir until well blended with the aromatics, about 1 minute.

Add the broth, coconut milk, cinnamon stick, 1 tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium low or low and simmer for 10 minutes.

Add the cauliflower, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and carrots. Raise the heat to medium high and return to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium low, cover, and simmer until the vegetables are tender, 20 to 25 minutes. Discard the cinnamon stick.

Stir in the chickpeas, spinach, lime juice, and zest; cook until the spinach has wilted, about 3 minutes more. Season to taste with salt. Serve garnished with the cilantro.

Registered dietitian Ellie Krieger is a Fine Cooking contributing editor.

