

Santé!

Holistic Health News from Dr. Sarah Cimperman
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"It is only possible to live happily ever after on a day-to-day basis."

Margaret Bonnano

Medicines in Your Kitchen

The kitchen herb and spice rack isn't the first place most people look for remedies to sooth stomachaches and other minor discomforts, but it's a good place to start. Before the advent of drug stores and medicine cabinets, people used local plants to treat illness and maintain good health. Eventually these plants became cultivated for regular consumption and found their way into everyday foods. Now regarded simply as seasoning, the medicinal uses of culinary herbs and spices have been largely forgotten. But from cinnamon to cayenne, you probably have plants with healing properties already in your kitchen.

Anise

Anise is one of the oldest known spices, dating back as far as 1500 B.C. It was used by the Romans to aid digestion after heavy meals and it is still used for this purpose today. Anise is a carminative spice, which means that it reduces intestinal gas. It also acts as an expectorant and a mild antispasmodic agent, helpful for expelling phlegm and quieting coughs during upper respiratory infections.

Cayenne

This nightshade plant can be eaten as a spice, taken as a medicine, or applied topically. Because it stimulates circulation and decreases pain, cayenne is a common ingredient in topical creams used for muscle spasms and joint pain. When taken internally, it can stimulate appetite and reduce inflammation in the body. It also acts as a diaphoretic to increase sweating. Current research is investigating its use in cancer and obesity.

Cinnamon

The use of cinnamon spans several centuries and many cultures. It has been most commonly used as a carminative spice but recent research has revealed antioxidant, antiinflammatory, antibacterial and antifungal actions. Scientists have found cinnamon to be a promising treatment in type 2 diabetes mellitus because it acts as a hypoglycemic agent, lowering blood sugar and improving glucose and insulin metabolism. One study of diabetics found that cinnamon also lowered cholesterol and triglycerides. Other research has shown that it may be helpful in treating cancer and severe viral infections.

Fennel

A plant native to Mediterranean regions, fennel is prized as both a food and a medicine. In India and other countries the seeds are chewed

after meals to freshen breath and aid digestion. Fennel is carminative and antispasmodic, reducing gastrointestinal gas, cramping and bloating. Randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trials have confirmed its success as a treatment for infant colic.

Fenugreek

Historically, fenugreek has been a condiment, incense, embalming agent and health tonic. It has been used medicinally in Chinese and Indian traditions to ease indigestion, aid labor and delivery and stimulate lactation. Recent research has uncovered hypolipidemic and hypoglycemic actions, giving it good potential to treat high cholesterol, diabetes mellitus and insulin resistance.

Garlic

Dating back to Hippocrates in ancient Greece, garlic has been used in many cultures for many complaints, including infections, abnormal growths, emotional health, and conditions of the heart, lungs and gastrointestinal system. Modern studies have shown that it has antibacterial, antifungal and antiparasitic properties, making garlic a good remedy for fighting infections. As a carminative and antispasmodic agent, it aids digestion. It has also been found to reduce blood pressure and levels of glucose, triglycerides, and LDL cholesterol, and increase HDL cholesterol. Because garlic acts as an anticoagulant, it may prevent blood clots and stroke but high dosages can increase the risk of bleeding. Recent research has also shown that garlic can reduce rates of cancer, particularly ovarian and colorectal cancers.

Ginger

Ginger has a long history of therapeutic use in Indian, Chinese and Japanese traditions. This root is anti-emetic, preventing and treating nausea and vomiting associated with motion sickness, pregnancy, chemotherapy and surgery. Ginger stimulates digestion while protecting the stomach lining and reduces gas and bloating. It is a warming spice and can act as a diaphoretic to increase sweating. Ginger also has expectorating and antitussive effects, expelling phlegm and quieting coughs during upper respiratory infections. It acts as an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent used to treat arthritis and cancer. Because ginger reduces the aggregation of blood platelets, it can decrease the risk of blood clots and stroke, and high dosages can increase the risk of bleeding.

Rosemary

Rosemary has been popular in Mediterranean cultures for flavoring foods as well as preserving them. Historically, rosemary has been used as a medicine to treat respiratory conditions, hair loss, menstrual pain and indigestion. Most research on rosemary has focused on the constituent rosmarinic acid, found to have strong antioxidant actions. It is being studied for potential use in cancer and inflammatory conditions.

Tumeric

Tumeric has been used traditionally in Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine to strengthen the body and treat fatigue, gallstones, gastrointestinal complaints, urinary conditions, menstrual pain and arthritis. One of its constituents, curcumin, has been studied for its antioxidant, antiinflammatory and anticancer effects. Scientists have found that curcumin induces apoptosis, or normal cell death designed to destroy cells when they become old, abnormal or cancerous. Studies have shown great potential for the use of tumeric in both the prevention and treatment of cancer. Tumeric also works as an anti-inflammatory agent with the same mechanism of action as pharmaceutical COX-2 inhibitors, drugs that reduce levels of enzymes that mediate inflammation in the body. As such, tumeric can be an effective remedy for inflammatory conditions such as arthritis.

Cooking with medicinal herbs and spices can have gentle, positive effects on the body. When used to treat specific conditions, therapeutic dosages are often significantly higher than amounts used in cooking and concentrated supplements may be necessary. Always talk to your doctor before taking any new medicines, whether natural or pharmaceutical, as interactions can occur and not all supplements are appropriate for all people.

Research Review: Allergies and Oral Contraceptives

Finnish researchers studied the association between allergies in children and the use of oral contraceptives (OC), also known as birth control pills, by moms prior to pregnancy. They studied 1182 five- and six-year olds, their rates allergic diseases, and whether or not their moms used the pill before they became pregnant. Kids whose moms had used the pill experienced higher rates of allergic rhinitis, commonly known as hay fever, compared to kids whose moms were OC-free. Boys tended to be affected more frequently than girls and

children whose parents had allergies were also more likely to develop hay fever.

Keski-Nisula L et al. Previous maternal use of contraceptive pills and allergic diseases among offspring. *Allergy*, 61(12):1467-72, Dec 2006.

Ask the Doc: Holiday Gift Ideas

I'm looking for healthy holiday gifts. Do you have any ideas?

*Emily
Sag Harbor, New York*

Choose holiday gifts that inspire good health for people as well as the planet. From greetings to goodies, here are my top twelve gift picks:

- **TreeGreetings**
Save some paper, plant a tree. For \$8.95 (or more, depending on your choice of tree and planting location) TreeGreetings will send your holiday (or other special) wishes by email and plant a tree. www.TreeGreetings.com
- **Reusable Bags**
More than 88 billion plastic bags are discarded every year in the United States and each one can take up to 1,000 years to decompose. Become part of the solution with reusable bags. EnviroSax and Baggu brands are colorful and small enough to fit in a pocket or a purse so you can take them anywhere. Reusablebags sells reusable gift bags called Wrapsacks, grocery totes and lunch sacks, all made from recycled materials and renewable resources such as hemp, bamboo and organic cotton. www.baggubag.com, usa.Envirosax.com, www.reusablebags.com
- **Antioxidant Teas**
White, green, oolong and rooibos teas are low in caffeine (rooibos has none) and high in antioxidants. Pamper your loved ones with unique and flavorful varieties, such as Lavender Dreams White Tea from Teavana or Rooibos and Roses from Octavia. www.Teavana.com, www.Octaviatea.com
- **Red Wine**

The perfect host or hostess gift, a bottle of red wine warms the holidays and packs a punch of antioxidants at the same time. Pick a bottle that fits your budget and feel confident that you can find a good bottle for less than \$10. My local favorites include Pythagorus red blend by Pindar on Long Island's North Fork (\$12.99) and Ravines Wine Cellars' Cerise (a blend of Pinot Noir and Lemberger, \$9.99) from New York's Finger Lakes. Another Finger Lakes favorite, Rooster Hill's Estate 2005 Lemberger is a bit more expensive and only available in their tasting room due to the extremely limited micro-production (only 30 cases were bottled). From Washington State, Red Diamond's Cabernet Sauvignon (\$7.99) is my favorite Pacific Northwest wine.

www.pindar.net, www.ravineswinecellars.com,
www.roosterhill.com, www.reddiamondwine.com

- **Cook Books**
Cold weather is a good time to stay in and pamper yourself and others with a healthy home-cooked meal. Soups are especially easy, extremely satisfying, and a convenient way to squeeze extra vegetables into daily diets. *Vegetable Soups from Deborah Madison's Kitchen* has something for everyone, from novices to seasoned gourmets. ISBN: 076791628X
- **Sun Jars**
This solar-powered jar charges during the day and lights up at night to provide up to five hours of candle-like light. It is water-tight and weather-proof so you can leave it outside to charge if you don't have a sunny window sill. Sun Jars are made by Suck UK in London, but can be ordered online from www.Elsewares.com for delivery to US addresses. www.Suck.UK.com
- **Bath and Massage Oils**
They are almost as easy to make yourself as they are to buy. If you have some high quality pure essential oils, you just need almond oil and a pretty bottle to make a quick and inexpensive gift. Personalize it with ginger for sore muscles, grapefruit for invigoration or lavender for sleep.
- **Back Massagers**
Less expensive than a gift certificate for a professional massage (also a nice present), back massagers encourage your loved ones to spend more time relaxing. Electric versions can be quite elaborate but the small manual ones feel just as good. They are

also more affordable often the perfect size for stuffing stockings. Your gift recipient will need a friend to enjoy this present, but if a rub is promised in return, that shouldn't be a problem.

- **Warming Neck Pillow**
Pillows that can be warmed up and wrapped around the neck sooth sore, tense and tired muscles where people often need it most. Natural fillers like buckwheat, flax seeds, hemp seeds, and cherry stones retain heat and moisture. Some pillows and wraps can be used with essential oils, which add to the therapeutic effect.
- **Nellie's Dryer Balls**
Replace chemical fabric softeners and disposable dryer sheets with these reusable dryer balls. Made from non-toxic PVC plastic, they allow for efficient air flow around clothing, saving time, money and materials. Clothes dry up to 25 percent faster and the balls even come with a 2-year unconditional money-back guarantee. www.NelliesLaundry.com
- **Tai Chi or Yoga Classes**
Give the gift of exercise. Gift certificates for exercise classes are widely available and largely affordable, and yoga and tai chi can benefit almost everyone. However, if your loved one is sedentary, he or she should get a doctor's permission before taking a new class or beginning a new exercise program.
- **Greensender Gift Box**
Greensender packs a progressive gift, complete with a reusable water bottle, a reusable grocery bag, an energy-efficient light bulb and an organic cotton t-shirt: www.GreenSender.com. Or save money and put together your own.

Please Note: I never accept commission or compensation of any kind for my recommendations. If I recommend a product or website or service, it is because I believe it is of exceptional quality and interest to my readers.

Apricot Almond Braised Chicken

1 tbsp hot water
Pinch saffron threads (optional)
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, first cold pressing

1 tbsp *garam masala**
4 bone-in skinless chicken thighs, trimmed of fat
1 medium onion, sliced or diced
2 cloves garlic, crushed or minced
1 cup chicken or vegetable stock
½ cup dried apricots
¼ cup golden raisins
¼ cup raw almonds
Pinch of sea salt
½ to 1 tsp honey
Cooked brown rice or quinoa, for serving

Pour the hot water over the saffron threads and set aside to steep.

In a Dutch oven, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Dust the chicken thighs with a generous sprinkle of *garam masala*. Place them inside the Dutch oven and brown both sides. Remove them from the pan and set aside.

Add the onion to the Dutch oven and sauté for ten minutes, until soft and starting to brown. Add the garlic and stir to combine. Continue sautéing until fragrant, about one minute. Add the saffron and its soaking liquid, stock, apricots and golden raisins. Cover and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for twenty minutes.

Add the almonds and turn the chicken thighs over. Continue cooking for another twenty minutes, until the meat is very tender and the sauce has thickened.

Remove the chicken thighs and place them on a bed of brown rice or quinoa. Add the salt and honey to the sauce. Stir to incorporate, taste and adjust seasoning if necessary. Pour the sauce over the chicken and serve immediately.

* If you don't have the spice blend, make your own using ground cinnamon, cumin, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg and/or mace.

Autumn Apple Salad

When choosing apples for this recipe, I pick up whatever is freshest at the Farmers' Market or whatever I happen to be most curious about when I encounter new varieties. Feel free to experiment with the dried

fruit too; unsweetened dried cherries, golden raisins and chopped figs can be used in place of the cranberries.

2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, first cold pressing
1 tbsp apple cider vinegar or brown rice vinegar
1 to 2 tsp maple syrup
¼ tsp ground dry mustard
Sea salt and ground peppercorn to taste
1 cup diced fresh apple, red or green
2 cups shredded Napa cabbage or red cabbage
2 green onions, thinly sliced
2 stalks celery, thinly sliced
1/3 cup chopped walnuts
½ cup unsweetened dried cranberries

In a large bowl, whisk together the olive oil, vinegar, maple syrup, dry mustard, salt and pepper. Add the apple, cabbage, green onion, celery and walnuts. Toss everything together until thoroughly combined and garnish with dried fruit. Serve immediately for a crunchy salad or store in the fridge for an hour or two for a softer salad.

Dark Chocolate Dipped Banana Bonbons

I think these are best consumed when the center of the bananas is still soft and not yet chilled through. If I make them while I am preparing dinner and leave them in the fridge until it's time for dessert, they are usually perfect.

1 banana per person
2 oz dark chocolate, 70% or greater, per banana
1 tbsp chopped raw almonds per banana, to garnish

Fill a small saucepan with one to two inches of water and place on the stove. Put a glass or stainless steel bowl on top of the saucepan. Heat the water to a gentle simmer. Meanwhile, cover a plate or baking sheet with wax paper and set aside.

Break or chop the dark chocolate into small pieces and add it to the bowl on the saucepan. Cover the chocolate with the lid of the saucepan and continue simmering the water for five minutes.

Turn off the heat and remove the bowl from the saucepan, taking care not to burn your hands as steam escapes the saucepan. Stir the chocolate, cover and set aside while you prepare the bananas.

Peel the bananas and cut each one into 8 pieces of approximately one-inch thickness. Add the banana pieces to the chocolate. Using two forks, toss the banana pieces to coat, then remove them and place them on the wax paper.

Put the bananas in the freezer for ten minutes to set the chocolate, then transfer them to the fridge until ready to eat.