

# Herbs and spices instead of salt

Herbs and spices have been a part of our diet for centuries as primitive medicines, perfumes and preservatives. But recently these ancient products have been gaining popularity and recognition. The reason?

Herbs and spices make foods more attractive and tastier. And, for those who are trying to stick to a restricted diet or even adapt to a healthier lifestyle, this can be very important.

Herbs and spices can be of particular help to those who are concerned about the amount of salt or sodium that they eat. Because of the link between excess sodium and hypertension (high blood pressure), it may be wise to reduce the amount of salt eaten. Yet, if you are accustomed to shaking salt on everything you eat, this may not be an easy thing to do. Without the addition of salt, many people find that food tastes bland, and is unappealing.

This is where herbs and spices can prove particularly useful. The many different herbs and spices available provide a variety of flavors that can make food more interesting — even add a gourmet touch! Many people who have had to cut back on salt claim that through experimenting and cooking with herbs and spices, they have rediscovered the natural good tastes of food.

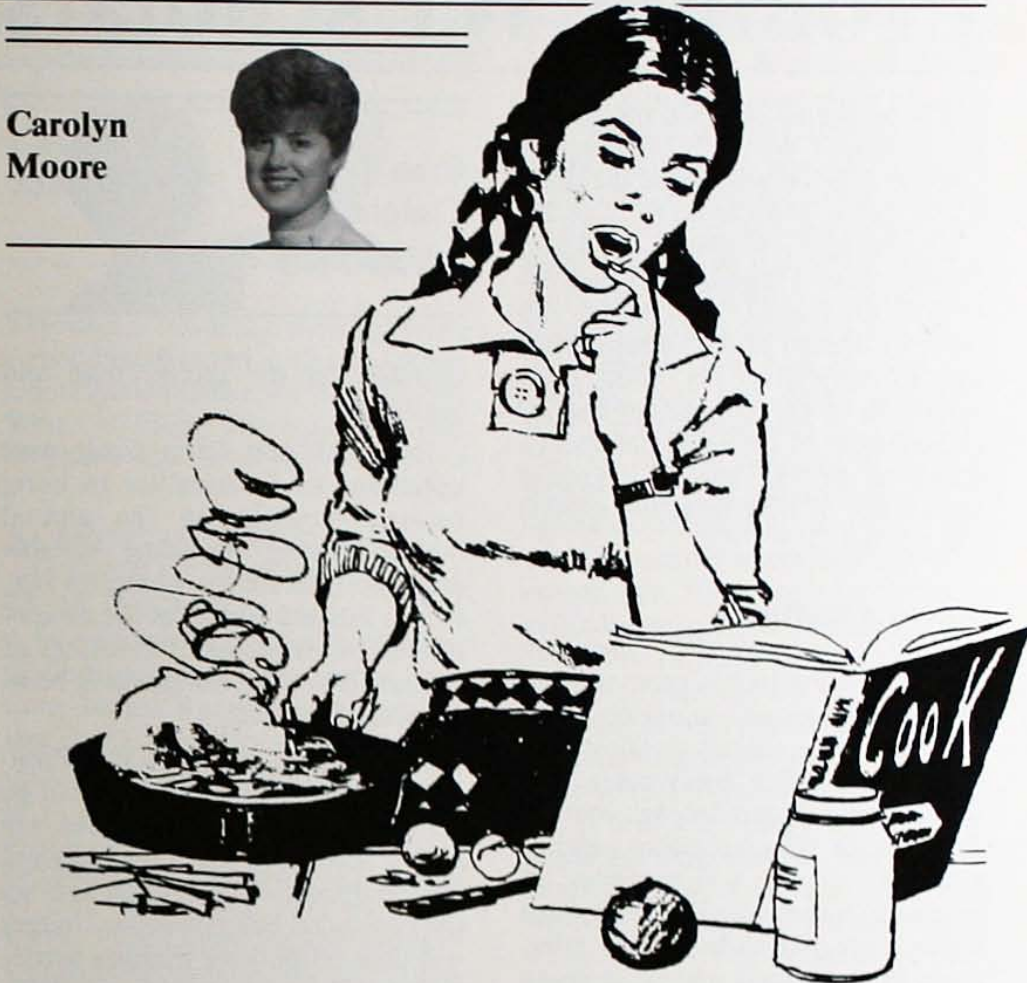
## RESTRAINT IS KEY

If you have not cooked extensively with herbs and spices, restraint is the key to success. An herb or spice should heighten the natural flavors of a food, not smother them.

Because people's tastes for seasonings differ, it is impossible to tell someone how much to add to a dish. However, when trying a seasoning for the first time, it is wise to use only half the amount called for in the recipe. Once you have established that you like it, you can always add more. (You can't however disguise it if you don't like it!)

It is generally recommended that 1/4 teaspoon (1 ml) of a pungent dried herb (basil, bay leaves, marjoram, thyme, oregano, rosemary) or 1/2 teaspoon (2 ml) of a mild dried herb (chives, mint, parsley) be added per one pound (500 grams) of meat, fish or poultry. Many recipes call for fresh

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herbs, if you don't have them on hand, you can substitute dried or ground herbs. A general rule of thumb is to substitute 1/2 teaspoon of ground or one teaspoon (5 ml) dried herbs for one tablespoon (15 ml) of fresh.

## WHOLE VS. GROUND SPICES

Spices are available in either the ground or whole form. Whole spices are best suited to long cooking dishes such as soups or stews where the flavor is extracted by the heat. Ground spices, on the other hand are ideal for quick cooking dishes.

Ground spices can be substituted for whole spices. However, because they give up their flavor quickly, they should be added near the end of the cooking period. Whether using whole or ground spices, be careful with the amount of heat that you use. High heat can cause spices to become bitter.

## PROPER STORAGE IMPORTANT

To maximize the flavor and aroma of your dried herbs and spices, ensure a regular turn around. The maximum storage time for whole spices is one

year, while ground spices and dried herbs should be used within six months. To keep track of how long you have had herbs and spices, date  
*continued on page 24*

## Salt alternatives

- \* Remember that some herbs and spices such as onion salt, garlic salt and celery salt do contain sodium and should be avoided. Use the powdered or minced forms instead.
- \* Bottled salad dressings are high in sodium. Make your own with lemon juice or vinegar, a bit of oil and herbs such as tarragon or cumin. Shake well in a covered jar.
- \* Before roasting or broiling chicken or fish, rub with lemon juice and herbs such as tarragon or oregano.
- \* Sprinkle carrots, peas, green beans and mushrooms with marjoram or add to melted butter for glaze.
- \* Make up your own packet of herbs without salt and take it with you whenever you eat out.