

# Cinnamon: spicy sprinkle with a history

Velvety rich flavor permeates the air from homemade apple pie, Danish pastry and steamed cappuccino. The common seasoning in all these recipes is cinnamon, one of the oldest spices known to man.

The Bible records the use of cinnamon as a component of the holy oil used to anoint the tabernacle of the congregation of the children of Israel.

Another early reference to cinnamon, cited in a treaty written by the Emperor Shen Nung, noted in Chinese tradition for introducing agricultural implements for the tilling of soil and the discovery of the medicinal properties of plants, dates back to about 2700 B.C.

In the Orient, cinnamon was used in the temples for counteracting the stench following offerings of burnt flesh.

Cinnamon is derived from the inner bark of the *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* tree, native to Ceylon. Cassia, from the *Cinnamomum cassia* tree found in Vietnam and the eastern Himalayas, is a close relative to cinnamon, except that its aroma is more intense and its flavor is not as delicate.

Much of the "cinnamon" used in the United States is really cassia. The Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act of 1938 authorizes the use of the term cinnamon for both *c. zeylanicum* and *c. cassia* as well as other species of cassia.

Although widely used today throughout the world, ancient Greece and Rome had few uses for cinnamon, which was often worth more than its weight in gold. When the Empress Poppea died in 66 A.D., Emperor Nero burned

a year's supply of Rome's cinnamon; it may have been the most expensive funeral pyre in history!

During the explorations of the 15th and 16th centuries, cinnamon became the victory prize of the conqueror. When the Portuguese seized Ceylon in 1505, they demanded large quantities of bark from the wild cinnamon trees.

About 150 years later, the Dutch took Ceylon from the Portuguese and began the cultivation of cinnamon.

Cinnamon gardens established by the Dutch are still available for viewing, and their pungent fragrance greets all seafaring visitors prior to their arrival.

It is debatable as to whether the British or the French broke the Dutch monopoly of cinnamon cultivation but, by the eighteenth century, several countries actively participated.

Enhancing such international dishes as *sopapillas* (little hot breads) and *caprirotada* (bread pudding) from Spain, Indian curries, South African milk soup and European chocolates and cocoa, cinnamon is popular throughout the world.

Enjoy cinnamon in new ways by trying the following recipes.

The recipes for early American Hot Buttered Rum and Cinnamon Creme Debanane, a flaming dessert, are excerpted from *Spices and Herbs: Lore & Cookery* (Dover Publications), by Elizabeth S. Hayes.

Olde English Wassail, is from *A Merry Christmas Herbal* (William Morrow & Co., Inc.), by Adelma G. Simmons.

## EARLY AMERICAN HOT BUTTERED RUM

2 ounces Puerto Rican rum  
1 teaspoon sugar  
1 stick cinnamon  
Pinch of nutmeg

Place ingredients in pre-heated mug. Fill with boiling water. Drop in generous glob of butter. Dip a cube of sugar in rum and light. Float flaming cube on top. Relax before open fire.  
Drink!

## CINNAMON CREME DEBANANE

2 bananas  
4 tablespoons butter  
½ cup brown sugar  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
1 ounce rum  
½ ounce creme debanane

Our Latin-American friends start this luscious dessert by peeling 2 bananas and then cutting them into 4 strips. In a large pan, so as not to crowd bananas, melt the butter, add brown sugar and cinnamon. When the sugar has melted and the mixture begins to thicken, place bananas in the pan and cook until soft. Remove from fire, add rum and creme debanane. Ignite and serve while hot. Serves 4. A perfect dessert with your coffee.

## OLDE ENGLISH WASSAIL

15 small perfect apples or preferably crabapples  
2 cups water  
1 teaspoon grated nutmeg  
2 teaspoons ground ginger  
3 sticks cinnamon  
12 cloves  
6 coriander seeds  
3 cardamom seeds  
2 quarts ale  
1 quart sherry  
2 cups sugar  
12 eggs, separated  
1 pint brandy

Core apples or crabapples and bake in a 350-degree oven about 20 minutes or until soft but not broken. Simmer in a saucepan for 10 minutes, water, spices, and 1 quart of ale. Add the second quart of ale, sherry, and sugar. Heat again but do not boil. Beat egg whites until they are stiff. Beat yolks until pale in color. Now slowly strain half the hot ale mixture over the egg yolks and pour into a warmed metal bowl. Reheat the ale-and-sherry mixture until steaming, then add to the bowl. Warm the brandy and pour it in. Fold in beaten egg whites and add roasted apples—the "lamb's wool and roasted crabs" of Shakespeare. Place an apple in each mug. Serves 15.

# Gingerbread men — as much fun to bake as they are to eat

Men, women, and especially children feel the excitement of Christmas upon them. While adults tend to their pre-Christmas responsibilities, children watch, eager to help. Use their boundless resources!

## "Kid power"

Young helpers can wrap gifts as well as assist with the baking. And, here's a recipe that's sure to please the kids — "Gingerbread Boys" from *Christmas Joys* by Joan Winmill Brown (Doubleday & Company, Inc.).

## GINGERBREAD BOYS

2½ cups sifted flour  
½ teaspoon salt  
2 teaspoons ginger  
½ cup butter or margarine  
½ cup sugar  
½ cup molasses  
½ teaspoon baking soda  
½ cup hot water

## DECORATIONS

Cinnamon candies ("red-hot")  
Seedless raisins

## EASY ICING

1 cup sifted confectioners' sugar  
¼ teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon vanilla  
1 tablespoon (about) heavy cream

Sift flour with salt and ginger and set aside. Melt butter in a large saucepan over low heat, remove from heat and mix in sugar, then molasses. Dissolve soda in hot water. Add dry ingredients to molasses mixture alternately with soda-water, beginning and ending with dry ingredients. Chill dough 2-3 hours. Preheat oven to 350°F. Roll out dough, a small portion at a time, ¼" thick. Cut with gingerbread boy cutter, handling dough carefully, and transfer

cookies to ungreased baking sheets (they should be spaced about 2" apart). Press on cinnamon candies for buttons and raisins for eyes and bake 10-12 minutes until lightly browned. Cool 2-3 minutes on sheets, then lift to wire racks. While cookies cool, prepare icing: mix sugar, salt, and vanilla; add cream, a few drops at a time, mixing well after each addition until icing is smooth and will hold a shape. Using a decorating tube, pipe outlines for collars, boots, cuffs, and belts. If you like, make a little extra icing, tint yellow, and use to pipe in hair. When frosting has hardened, store airtight. **Note:** Gingerbread boys can be made several days ahead and piped with icing shortly before serving. If they soften in storage, warm 3-5 minutes at 350°F, to crispen, then cool on racks. About 130 calories each. Makes two dozen.



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