

By Susan E. Poppiti, Esquire

# Spice Up Your Spice Cabinet

September signifies back to school and fresh starts. Youngsters are eagerly (or grudgingly) filling their backpacks with shiny binders and sharpened pencils. So, why not join in the spirit of fresh starts by refurbishing the heart and soul of your kitchen — your spice cabinet.

A complete overhaul may not be necessary. Perhaps you could consolidate a few containers of peppercorns to create enough room to add just five more items. Here are five of my favorites that are not too obscure.

## Cumin Seed

These aromatic seeds are common in Indian and Middle Eastern cuisine. They have a nutty flavor and aid in digestion. A simple way to incorporate them into your repertoire is to jazz up eggs. Just heat a few teaspoons in a nonstick pan along with sea salt, fresh ground pepper and olive oil, then add eggs to scramble. For a meat dish, add cumin seeds to a pork loin marinade. Simply drizzle a pork loin with soy sauce, sesame oil and extra virgin olive oil, then sprinkle with several teaspoons of cumin seed.

## Sesame Seed

You see these on crackers, bagels, and breads and may even have them in your spice cabinet. Yet, if they have been sitting behind a container of McCormick dried sage for years, they may need refreshing. The simplest way to enjoy the nutty flavor of sesame seeds is to toast them for about one minute over medium heat in a nonstick pan and add to your favorite salad. Or, sprinkle the toasted cuties over asparagus spears drizzled with soy sauce and extra virgin olive oil.

## Yellow Mustard Seed

I have no doubt that you have some sort of mustard in your fridge; the only question is whether it is Dijon or French's. But, do you have mustard seeds in your spice cabinet? I enjoy the earthy flavor and crunchy texture of these little spheres on grilled meats. Before drizzling a

pork chop or steak with olive oil in preparation for grilling, press these seeds into the meat to create a crunchy coating. If you would like more kick, try brown mustard seeds as yellow ones are the mildest.

## Zahtar

This Middle Eastern spice blend is one you can make on your own or buy in the spice aisle. It is a lemony combination of sesame seed, ground sumac (reddish powder with a lemony flavor highlighted in the roasted chicken recipe from my March 2017 article), dried thyme and sea salt. Two of my top preparations with Zahtar could not be simpler. The first is to sprinkle the spice over olive oil in a dipping dish to accompany bread or focaccia. The other is to shake on top of fried eggs for a zesty breakfast protein.

## Falksalt

No spice cabinet is complete without finishing salts. A new favorite is Falksalt, a Swedish salt company that produces its Mediterranean sea salt in Cyprus. I have found these salts in both Williams Sonoma and Fante's in Philly's Italian Market. Falksalt's wide variety of flavors include Black Pepper, Citron and Wild Garlic. The large flakes that sometimes appear in their entirety as mini pyramids make for a perfect focaccia topping or a finishing salt for seafood or meat. Recently, I added the Citron to a pan-seared Pocono trout for a light summer dinner.

You can transform a dish with just one spice, so I encourage you to rejuvenate your spice cabinet this fall as we in the academic world make a fresh start this September. 🍷



**Susan E. Poppiti** is a mathematics teacher and director of the legal shadowing program at Padua Academy High School and managing member and cooking instructor for La Cucina di Poppiti, LLC and can be reached at [spoppiti@hotmail.com](mailto:spoppiti@hotmail.com). Other recipes and cooking tips are available on Susan's food blog at [www.cucinadipoppiti.com](http://www.cucinadipoppiti.com).



© istockphoto.com/ sereznly