

Star Anise

by Mukul

Star anise is a spice that is commonly used in Asian cuisine. It is the fruit of a small evergreen tree called *Illicium verum*, which is native to China and Vietnam. The tree produces small, greenish-yellow flowers that eventually develop into the distinctive star-shaped pods that we know as star anise.

1. What Does Star Anise Look and Taste Like?

Star anise is a distinctive looking spice that resembles a small rust-coloured star. It usually has between 6 to 8 points, each point containing a small seed that is the flavour epicentre. The spice gives a sweet, liquorice-y flavour to dishes similar to clove and aniseed. It is native to China and Vietnam; star anise is a star-shaped spice. It is a common ingredient in Chinese cuisine and has a sweet flavour that is similar to liquorice. You can use star anise (sometimes referred to as Chinese star anise) to infuse flavour into herbal teas, cocktails, soups, braised meats, and poached fruit.

1.1 Uses in Cooking:

Star anise is a versatile spice that is used in both sweet and savoury dishes. It is often used in spice blends, such as Chinese five-spice powder, and is also a key ingredient in many broths and stocks. In Chinese cuisine, it is commonly used in braised dishes, such as red-cooked pork and soy sauce chicken. In Vietnamese cuisine, it is used in the classic soup, pho.

Star anise can also be used in desserts, such as fruit compotes and baked goods. It pairs well with cinnamon, ginger, and cloves, and is often used in combination with these spices.

Star anise is used similarly to bay leaves in Vietnamese and Chinese cuisine. When used whole, star anise pods are simmered in soups, stews, and braises. Like bay leaves, star anise is usually removed and discarded from the dish before serving. It pairs well in savoury recipes with citrus, poultry, and beef, adding a contrasting sweet liquorice-like flavour to dishes.

Ground star anise is more potent and can be added in small quantities to dishes and baked goods. It is a common spice in Indian cuisine, used in the spice blend garam masala, as well as chai tea.

1.1.1 Medical benefits of star anise

Antimicrobial Properties: Star anise contains compounds such as shikimic acid and anethole, which have been shown to have antibacterial and antifungal properties. As a result, it may be useful in treating infections caused by bacteria or fungi.

1. Respiratory Benefits: Star anise has been traditionally used to relieve respiratory symptoms such as coughs, asthma, and bronchitis. Its expectorant properties may help to loosen mucus and relieve congestion.

2. Digestive Aid: Star anise contains compounds that help to stimulate digestion and relieve digestive discomfort such as bloating and gas. It is also believed to have a carminative effect, which can help to prevent the formation of gas in the digestive tract.

3. Anti-inflammatory Properties: Some studies have shown that star anise may have anti-inflammatory properties. This may make it useful in treating conditions such as arthritis and other inflammatory disorders.

4. Antioxidant Properties: Star anise contains compounds such as flavonoids and polyphenols that have antioxidant properties. These compounds may help to protect against oxidative stress, which can contribute to a range of chronic diseases.

However, it is important to note that while star anise has potential medicinal properties, more research is needed to confirm its effectiveness and safety. Additionally, it can interact with some medications and should be used with caution. As with any herbal remedy, it is important to speak with a healthcare professional before using star anise for medicinal purposes.

1.1.2 What is the Difference Between Star Anise and Anise?

Despite the similarities in name and liquorice flavour, star anise and anise come from different plants and are not related. Star anise is the star-shaped fruit of a tree that is a member of the magnolia family. It is most often used in Asian cooking, with a flavour that is stronger and more potent than anise seed. Anise (Aniseed) is a flowering plant in the family Apiaceous, related to dill and cumin. It is used in liquors like sambuca and ouzo. The seeds are used in herbal teas and breads throughout the Mediterranean.

1.1.3 How to Substitute Star Anise

1. Five-Spice Powder. Chinese five-spice powder already contains star anise and can be found conveniently in most grocery stores. Use 1½ teaspoons of five-spice powder for every 2 teaspoons of ground star anise your recipe calls for.

2. Anise Seed. Anise seed shares a liquorice note that is also found in star anise, and although both spices contain the word anise, they are not related. When replacing star anise with anise seed, make sure to use twice the amount of anise seed because it is much milder.

3. Allspice. Allspice is sweeter than star anise and lacks the liquorice notes but can be used as if you are in a pinch. When it is ground, it releases aromatic notes similar to cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg.

1.1.4 4 Easy Star Anise Recipe Ideas

1. To make star anise tea, begin by setting a kettle of water to boil. Place 1-to-2-star anise pods per cup of water inside a teapot and let steep for 10-15 minutes. Strain and sweeten with honey. Drink up to 3 times a day, after each meal, to soothe your digestion.

2. To make five-spice powder, toast 2 teaspoons of Sichuan peppercorns in a dry pan until their aroma releases, about 2-3 minutes. Grind the peppercorns with 5-star anise seeds in a spice grinder. Blend the mixture with ½ teaspoon ground cloves, 1 tablespoon ground Chinese cinnamon, and 1 tablespoon ground fennel seed. Store in an airtight container and keep in a dark, cool place.

3. To make soy sauce chicken, heat 2 pounds chicken wings, 1 cup soy sauce, and 3 cups water in a large pot over medium heat. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a gentle simmer. Add 1 2-inch piece of sliced ginger, 3 smashed garlic cloves, 3 tbsp sugar, 1 cinnamon stick, and 3-star anise seeds. Allow the chicken to simmer for 25 to 30 minutes, until cooked and tender.

4. To make poached pears, combine 2 cups dry red wine, ⅔ cup sugar, ½ cup water, and 4-star anise seeds in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil, stirring until the sugar has dissolved. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Add 3 bosc pears (peeled, halved, and cored). Simmer until tender and the liquid has reduced to a syrup consistency, about 25 minutes.

conclusion

Overall, star anise is a versatile spice that adds a unique flavour to a variety of dishes. Its medicinal properties make it a valuable addition to any spice rack.