

Keep Your Spice Rack On Track for Fall Flavors

Have the cooler temperatures and turning leaves got you thinking of flavors like pumpkin spice or apple cinnamon?

For many, fall means comfort foods and incorporating spicy autumn flavors into homemade chili and stews, warming ciders, and holiday baking. If you are like me, you totally enjoy using spices to create fragrant and flavorful foods to enjoy on crisp fall evenings or for your holiday table.

Spices and herbs not only add wonderful flavors, but they also add the healthy benefit of allowing cooks to use less added fats, sugar and salt when creating meals. The fresher the spice, the greater the flavor.

So, when was the last time you looked at your spices? Do they still have a bright color, or a strong fragrance? Are they expired?

The USDA defines spices and other foods that can be stored at room temperature as a

“Shelf Stable” product that will truly never expire, however, over time the flavor and potency of the spices will diminish. Flavoring extracts can evaporate overtime.

Here are some guidelines to help you determine when it’s time to toss your spices and

herbs.

***As a general rule, keep: herbs or ground spices for 1 year and whole spices for 2 years.**

***Buy a smaller container until you determine how fast you’ll use a particular spice or herb.**

***If a spice or herb smells strong and flavorful, it’s probably still potent.**

***Check an herb or a ground spice by rubbing a small amount in your hand. If the aroma is fresh, rich and immediate, it can still flavor foods.**

***Check a whole spice---such as a clove or cinnamon stick---by breaking, crushing or scraping it before smelling it.**

***Avoid smelling pepper or chili powder as they can irritate your nose.**

***Initial quality will influence shelf life.**

***Label your date of purchase on the container with a permanent marker.**

Use the following guidelines for storing your spices and herbs to maintain maximum quality.

***To prevent flavor and color loss, avoid moisture, light, heat and air.**

***Store in tightly covered containers.**

***Store in a dark place away from sunlight, such as inside a cupboard or drawer.**

***Avoid storage above the dishwasher, microwave, stove or refrigerator, or near a sink or heating vent.**

***If storing in an open spice rack, store in a site away from heat, light and moisture.**

***Avoid sprinkling dried spices and herbs directly from container into a steaming pot to prevent moisture from entering the container.**

***Use a dry spoon to measure spices and herbs from a container.**

***Refrigerate paprika, chili powder and red pepper for best color retention, especially in summer or hotter climates.**

Is it time to give your spice rack a once-over so you will be prepared for creating the amazing flavors of fall?