

# 20 Important Herbs And Spices Used In Thai Cooking

*web source: asian-recipe.com*

The following are some essential herbs and spices used in Thai cooking. The proper combination of all these ingredients is regarded as an art in Thailand, one that requires both skill and time. The preparation of a single sauce can take hours of grinding, tasting and delicate adjustment until the exact balance of flavors is achieved. Only then, can the true glory of Thai cooking be fully appreciated.

## **Basil (horapha, kaphrao, maenglak)**

Horapha, kaphrao, maenglak are varieties of sweet basil. Horapha seems to be the nearest to the sweet basil used in European tomato dishes and Italian pesto. Horapha is used here as a vegetable and for flavoring. Fresh leaves are narrower and often tinged with reddish purple. It releases its aroma and flavor only when cooked and is used with fish, beef and chicken. Maenglak leaves are slightly hairy and paler green than horapha. It is sometimes called lemon-scented basil but definitely has a peppery taste when chewed; it is very similar to Italian dwarf basil and is used as a vegetable and for flavoring.

## **Cinnamon (ob choei)**

Form the bark of a tree, the type of cinnamon used in Thailand is of only one kind, that from the Cassia tree. It is used in meat dishes and particularly in massaman curry a garnish.

## **Bird Chilli (phrik khi nu)**

The smallest of the chillies, of which the kind called phrik khi nu suan is the hottest. Take care when chopping them, and do not rub your eyes. Chillies stimulate blood circulation and are reputed to help prevent heart disease and cancer.

## **Chilli (Phrik chi fa)**

Phrik chi fa are finger size, growing 9-12 centimeters in length, and ether yellow, red or green. Not as hot as the bird chili. There is no discernable difference between the colors.

## **Citron (som sa)**

Citron (*citrus medica* var *limetta*) is a round dark green fruit. Its thick, very aromatic skin is much used for flavoring. Sour orange juice and orange peel would make the best substitute.

## **Cloves (kanphlu)**

Cloves (*eugenia aromatica*) are the dried flower buds of an evergreen tree native to the Molucca Islands. They are almost as expensive as saffron because crops often fail, they are much used in Western cooking and the oil is antiseptic. Cloves are used in massaman curry and to chew as a relief for toothache.

### **Coriander (phak chee)**

The leaves are often chosen for decoration, with stem and roots for seasoning. Heavily used in Asian kitchens, the Thai kitchen is the only one to use the roots as well.

### **Cumin (yira)**

Seeds look like caraway and fennel, but taste quite different and have to be heated to release their aroma. Only cumin is used in Thai cooking, mainly in the making of curry pastes.

### **Galangal (kha)**

Resembling an upturned claw, this member of the ginger family is a pale pink rhizome with a subtle citrus flavor. It is usually added in large pieces to impart flavor to fish or chicken stock, or used in making curry pastes. Fresh young ginger can be substituted, but you will not end up with the same flavor.

### **Garlic (krathiam)**

Thailand is literally overflowing with garlic plants. Whole cloves, smashed garlic and garlic oil are used in almost every Thai dish. To make garlic oil, chop a handful of garlic, and fry it in plenty of hot oil until golden. The oil and the fried garlics can be stored in a jar for garnishing soup and for tossing with noodles and rice.

### **Ginger (khing)**

Resembling a flat hand, ginger has over 400 members included in its family. Always choose young fresh ginger if available. Easily grated, it is eaten raw or cooked and is used widely in many Asian cuisines. Young ginger, when pounded with a little salt, pepper and garlic is good as a marinade for chicken or beef. Ginger is acknowledged to improve digestion and to counteract nausea and vomiting.

### **Krachai**

There is no common English name for krachai (*kaempferia pandurata*). The tubers of this member of the ginger family look like a bunch of yellow brown fingers. Krachai is always added to fish curries, and peeled and served as a raw vegetable with the popular summer rice dish, khao chae.

### **Kaffir Lime Leaf (bai makrut)**

From the kaffir lime, which has virtually no juice these fleshy green and glossy leaves resemble a figure eight. Imparting a unique flavor, they can be finely shredded and added to salads, or torn and added to soups and curries. Can be substituted with other lemon-flavored herbs, but the best option is to freeze the leaves when you can find them, as they retain all their flavor and texture on thawing

### **Lime (manao)**

The whole fruit is used. It is an excellent source of vitamin C and is used to enhance the flavor of chili-hot condiments, as well as create some very special salads and desserts, and adorn most dishes as a condiment.

### **Mint (bai saranae)**

This mint (*mentha arvensis*) is similar to the mint used for mint sauce in England and is used in Thai food as a vegetable and a flavoring.

### **Nutmeg (luk chan)**

The nut is enclosed in a very hard brown shell. It is used in the making of massaman curry paste.

### **Pepper (prik thai)**

Black, white and green peppercorn types. Black is milder and more aromatic than white. Green peppercorns have a special taste all their own and are available all year round but are best towards the end of the rainy season. Used as flavoring.

### **Sesame (nga)**

Identical to sesame seeds the world over. In Thai cooking, sesame seeds are used for oil and for flavoring. These tiny seeds are rich in protein.

### **Shallot (hom daeng)**

These small, zesty, Thai red onions are sweet and aromatic. An essential ingredient in many Thai dishes because of their taste and appearance, they can be substituted with European shallots, small red onions or small brown onions.

### **Spring Onions (ton hom)**

Spring onion shoots (*allium fistulosum*) are used for garnishing soups and salads and often eaten alongside pad Thai.

### **Turmeric (khamin)**

These small, bright orange roots are used for the coloring in yellow curries. White turmeric, a different type, is used as a raw vegetable and resembles ginger. It tastes only slightly peppery and has a pleasant tang.