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### ALL ABOUT FIVE-SPICE



Five-spice powder has its roots in ancient China, with its development likely dating back to the Qin or Han dynasties (221–220 BCE). Originally created as part of traditional Chinese medicine, the blend was designed to harmonize the body's internal energies, aligning with the principles of Yin and Yang.

By the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), five-spice powder had risen above medicinal use to become a culinary staple, and its prominence grew further during the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE), where it was embraced in a wide range of dishes. Over time, its fame spread across East and Southeast Asia, leaving a lasting mark on Vietnamese, Taiwanese, and Malaysian cuisines. The spice blend later garnered global recognition through the spice trade, becoming a celebrated ingredient in fusion cuisine.

The traditional preparation of five-spice powder is an art form. The individual spices—commonly star anise, cloves, Chinese cinnamon or cassia, Sichuan peppercorns, and fennel seeds—are carefully dry-roasted to unlock their full aroma and flavor. After roasting, they are finely ground and meticulously blended in precise proportions to achieve a harmonious balance of the five foundational flavors.

While commercial production allows for widespread availability and consistency, many culinary enthusiasts and chefs prefer crafting their own blends, as homemade versions often deliver superior freshness, potency, and vibrancy. This meticulous preparation not only preserves the authentic essence of the blend but also ensures its versatility in enhancing dishes around the world.

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DECEMBER 2024
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2

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### HEALTHY INGREDIENT CONTRIBUTION



Because five-spice, when used in the kitchen, is traditionally utilized in smaller quantities, the impact is minimal in relation to the recommended daily intake of vitamins and minerals. However, including the popular spice blend as part of your regular diet still has many proven, positive effects on the body. Here is a breakdown of typical components in traditional five-spice blends and their health benefits.

<p><b>Star Anise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Digestive Aid:</b> Contains anethole, helps reduce bloating and indigestion</li> <li>• <b>Antimicrobial:</b> Exhibits antifungal and antibacterial properties</li> <li>• <b>Antioxidants:</b> Helps combat free radicals, reducing oxidative stress</li> </ul> <p><b>Cloves</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Anti-inflammatory:</b> Contains eugenol with potent anti-inflammatory properties</li> <li>• <b>Rich in Manganese:</b> Supports bone health and metabolic functions</li> <li>• <b>Antibacterial:</b> Helps combat harmful bacteria in the gut and oral cavity</li> </ul> <p><b>Chinese Cinnamon (Cassia)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Blood Sugar:</b> Can help stabilize blood sugar levels</li> <li>• <b>Antioxidants:</b> Rich in polyphenols, protecting cells from damage</li> <li>• <b>Anti-inflammatory:</b> Aids in reducing inflammation and supporting heart health</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sichuan Pepper</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pain Relief:</b> Contains hydroxy-alpha-sanshool, which may reduce pain sensitivity</li> <li>• <b>Improves Digestion:</b> Stimulates saliva and gastric juice production</li> <li>• <b>Rich in Minerals:</b> Contains zinc, potassium, and iron, supporting immune health</li> </ul> <p><b>Fennel Seed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Digestive Health:</b> Helps reduce bloating, indigestion, and gas</li> <li>• <b>Hormonal Support:</b> Contains phytoestrogens that may support hormonal balance</li> <li>• <b>Rich in Fiber:</b> Helps maintain healthy digestion</li> </ul>
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3

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## TYPES AND VARIETIES

The classic five-spice powder has a rich array of variations influenced by regional traditions, cultural nuances, and personal tastes. While the traditional blend features star anise, cloves, Chinese cinnamon (cassia), Sichuan pepper, and fennel seeds, many versions incorporate additional flavoring ingredients, creating distinct and unique flavor profiles.



### Variations:

- **Cantonese Five-Spice:** Includes dried tangerine peel giving it a bright, citrusy note with a tangy bite.
- **Sichuan Five-Spice:** Features a high concentration of Sichuan pepper giving it a pungent, numbing and fiery affect.
- **Northern Chinese Five-Spice:** Can include ginger and nutmeg giving it an earthy and robust flavor with a warm finish.
- **Vietnamese Five-Spice:** Additions can include cloves, coriander seeds, and cardamom giving it a sweet taste with an aroma of citrus and floral notes.
- **Thai Five-Spice:** Often includes white pepper and/or galangal giving it a slightly spicy taste on the tongue.
- **Taiwanese Five-Spice:** Integrates white pepper and dried ginger into the blend giving it a warm flavor along with a peppery sharpness.
- **Malay Five-Spice:** Incorporates nutmeg and curry leaves giving it an aromatic and earthy profile with a hint of tropical spice.

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4

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## SELECTING AND STORING

### Selecting Five-Spice:

- **Check the Ingredients:** Some blends may include additional spices other than the five found in traditional five-spice so look for blends that are made with high-quality spices and include the spices based on your flavor preference.
- **Source:** Always buy spices from reputable brands or specialty spice shops that have high turnover to ensure freshness.
- **Aroma:** Fresh five-spice powder should have a strong, balanced fragrance. Avoid blends with a musty or faint smell.
- **Texture:** Opt for finely ground powder for even blending in recipes or whole spices if you plan to grind your own.
- **Grind Your Own:** In lieu of buying a pre-ground blend, you can grind your own which ensures optimal freshness, vibrant flavor, and aroma. This method also allows you to tailor the blend to your specific flavor preference.
- **Packaging:** Look for airtight, light-blocking containers. Exposure to air and light can degrade spices over time.
- **Small Quantities:** If used infrequently, consider purchasing smaller quantities to ensure deliver of maximum potency.

### Storing Five-Spice:

- **Airtight Container:** Store in a tightly sealed glass jar or airtight container to reduce flavor-diminishing airflow.
- **Cool, Dark Place:** Keep spice containers in a pantry away from heat, light, and moisture. Avoid storing spices near the range or other heat sources.
- **Avoid Refrigeration:** Spices do not require refrigeration and tend to pick up moisture and odors when stored in the refrigerator.
- **Monitor Shelf Life:** Ground five-spice powder stays fresh for approximately 6-12 months whereas whole spices last up to two years but should be ground just before use for optimal flavor.
- **Perform Periodic Checks:** Assess the aroma and flavor occasionally. If the spice blend smells dull or the taste has faded, it's time to replace it.

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5

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## CULINARY USES

Five-spice powder is a versatile ingredient known for its ability to elevate and harmonize the flavors of a wide variety of dishes. Its unique blend of sweet, spicy, bitter, sour, and umami notes creates a complex and well-rounded flavor profile, making it a cornerstone of culinary traditions across many cultures. Its ability to complement a wide range of ingredients ensures its place as a go-to ingredient for chefs eager to explore bold, dynamic, and harmonious flavors across diverse cuisines.



**Marinades & Rubs:** Works exceptionally well with pork, chicken, beef, and duck. It's a staple for roasted meats including Char Siu (Chinese BBQ Pork) and Peking duck.

**Sauces & Dips:** Enhances dipping sauces, especially soy or hoisin-based ones, and can add depth to a variety of dressings.

**Soups & Stocks:** Adds complexity and richness to soups such as pho or herbal broths.

**Snacks & Street Foods:** Perfect pairing for coating roasted nuts, adding a savory component to popcorn, and adding a kick to a variety of fried foods.

**Pickling & Fermentation:** Add to pickling brines for an Asian-inspired flavor profile or for a unique taste to fermented foods such as kimchi, sauerkraut, and miso.

**Beverages:** Create infused syrups for spiced cocktails or blend into spiced teas for a bold, warming aroma.

**Desserts:** Brings a warm, spicy note to cookies, cakes, gingerbread, and even ice cream.

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6

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## FUN FACTS



- Five-spice is rooted in ancient Chinese medicine where it is believed to balance the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water) and harmonize yin and yang.
- In the culinary world, five-spice represents the five primary flavors of sweet, sour, bitter, salty, and umami, allowing it to appeal to all taste buds.
- In traditional Chinese culture, five-spice powder is also used for aromatherapy and medicine.
- Don't let the name fool you, depending on its origin, five-spice powder can contain more or less than a total of five spices.
- The inclusion of Sichuan peppercorns gives the blend a unique sensation: a tingling, numbing effect on the tongue that intensifies other flavors.
- Five-spice's intense flavor profile naturally enhances umami, making it a great alternative to MSG in recipes.

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7

## RECIPE

### Five-Spice Gingerbread Cookies

Yield: 24 3-inch Cookies



<p><b>Ingredients:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 ¼ C. Flour, All-Purpose</li> <li>1 ½ t. Ginger, Ground</li> <li>½ t. Cinnamon, Ground</li> <li>1 t. Five-Spice, Ground</li> <li>½ t. Cloves, Ground</li> <li>½ t. Baking Soda</li> <li>¼ t. Salt</li> <li>½ C. Butter, Unsalted, Softened</li> <li>½ C. Brown Sugar</li> <li>½ C. Molasses</li> <li>1 Egg</li> <li>1 t. Vanilla Extract</li> </ul>	<p><b>Directions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C). Line baking sheets with parchment paper.</li> <li>2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, ginger, cinnamon, five-spice powder, cloves, baking soda, and salt.</li> <li>3. In a large bowl, cream together the butter and brown sugar until light and fluffy. Add the molasses, egg, and vanilla extract, and mix until smooth.</li> <li>4. Gradually add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients and mix until a dough forms.</li> <li>5. Roll the dough out on a lightly floured surface to about 1/4-inch thick. Cut into shapes with cookie cutters and place on the prepared baking sheets.</li> <li>6. Bake for 8-10 minutes or until the edges are firm and the cookies are lightly browned.</li> <li>7. Allow to cool on a wire rack before icing or serving.</li> </ol>
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8

## QUIZ



After you read through this month's Ingredient of the Month, take this quiz to test your knowledge. In order to earn continuing education hours (CEHs) from the American Culinary Federation (ACF), the test must be completed through the ACF's Online Learning Center. Seventy-five percent accuracy is required to earn one hour of continuing education credits toward professional certification.

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9

**QUIZ**

Question #1



During which dynasty did five-spice powder rise above medicinal use to become a culinary staple?

- A. Tang Dynasty
- B. Han Dynasty
- C. Song Dynasty
- D. Qin Dynasty

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10

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**QUIZ**

Question #2



What is the alternative name commonly used for Chinese cinnamon?

- A. Ceylon
- B. Canella
- C. Cassia
- D. Corintje

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11

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**QUIZ**

Question #3



The cloves found in five-spice are rich in manganese, which supports bone health and metabolic functions.

- A. True
- B. False

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12

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**QUIZ**

Question #4



Which regional five-spice powder includes white pepper and galangal?

- A. Taiwanese Five-Spice
- B. Malay Five-Spice
- C. Cantonese Five-Spice
- D. Thai Five-Spice

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13

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**QUIZ**

Question #5



Vietnamese five-spice powder is characterized by the addition of curry leaves and dried tangerine peel.

- A. True
- B. False

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14

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**QUIZ**

Question #6



What should you do if your five-spice powder smells dull or the flavor has faded?

- A. Add salt to enhance the flavor
- B. Mix it with another spice blend
- C. Freeze it to restore its potency
- D. Replace it with a fresh batch

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15

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**QUIZ**

Question #7

How long does ground five-spice powder typically remain fresh?

A. 1-3 months  
B. 6-12 months  
C. 18-24 months  
D. Indefinitely if stored properly



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16

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**QUIZ**

Question #8

Which of the following uses would NOT be a commonly found culinary use of five-spice?

A. Seasoning sushi rice  
B. Adding to herbal broths  
C. Coating roasted nuts  
D. Infusing syrups for cocktails



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17

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**QUIZ**

Question #9

Why is five-spice powder considered to be an alternative to monosodium glutamate (MSG)?

A. It has a similar texture  
B. It is gluten-free  
C. It enhances umami flavor  
D. It contains less sodium



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18

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**QUIZ**

Question #10



Which mixing method is utilized when preparing the five-spice gingerbread cookies?

- A. One-Bowl Method
- B. Creaming Method
- C. Cut-In Method
- D. Blending Method

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19

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**JOIN US NEXT MONTH!**



Stay tuned for the next ACF Ingredient of the Month! Be sure to visit the Online Learning Center (OLC) to download a copy of each month's ingredient presentation. Don't forget to take the official IOTM quiz through the OLC to earn one hour of continuing education credits toward professional certification.

For more information:

- [www.acfchefs.org](http://www.acfchefs.org)
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20

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