



August 2026 : Cumin Seeds

Cumin is a strong aromatic spice with a slightly bitter and pungent taste, made from the dried ripe fruit of *Cuminum cyminum* L. Cumin seeds are similar to fennel and anise seeds in appearance, but are smaller and darker in color. The flavor characteristics of cumin have been described as: burlap, rye-like, earthy/dirty, green, musty, soapy, and pine-like. Yum!

Cumin likely originated in Iran and the Mediterranean region. It is mentioned in the Bible in both the Old & New Testament. Its oldest known use dates back 5,000 years, as an ingredient in Egyptian mummification. It was highly regarded as a condiment by the ancient Greeks, and is still used in medicine in India. It became a staple in both Mexican and South American cuisine after the arrival of Spanish and Portuguese colonists. Today, Cumin is the second most popular spice after black pepper, and India is its largest producer - they provide 70% of the world's cumin.

Culinary Uses: Cumin is often included in spice blends such as curry powder, chili powder, garam masala, adobo and berbere. Some say that cumin is always on the table somewhere in the world. It's an essential spice in India and is used in curries, dals, rice, and other traditional dishes. In the Middle East it is used to flavor kebabs, lentils, and meat dishes, and it's a key ingredient in Mexican dishes like moles, enchiladas, and tamales. Cumin is also frequently used in North African and Mediterranean cuisines.

Whole cumin seeds are often toasted to enhance flavor and should be added early in the recipe to allow for the full flavor to release.

Fun Facts: The ancient Greeks kept cumin at the dining table in its own container and Moroccans continue this practice today.

During Roman times, cumin was associated with being frugal with money. Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor from 161-180 AD, had the nickname Marcus Cuminus because his subjects thought he was reluctant to spend money.

Superstition during the Middle Ages cited that cumin kept chickens and lovers from wandering. It was also believed that a happy life awaited the bride and groom who carried cumin seeds throughout the wedding ceremony.

Cumin was widely available in medieval England and was sometimes used as currency. Many tenants paid their rent in cumin and pepper.



SWEET POTATO SOUP WITH CHILE OIL

Time: 40 minutes

Servings: 3-4

Ingredients

For the soup:

- 1 head of garlic
- 2 tsp. plus 2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 ½ lbs. sweet potatoes (about 3 medium), peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes
- 1 medium yellow onion, peeled and diced
- 1 tsp. cumin seeds
- 3 cups low-sodium vegetable stock
- 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ tsp. ground turmeric
- Fine sea salt

For the chile oil:

- ½ cup neutral oil, such as grapeseed
- 2 Tbsp. red-pepper flakes, such as Aleppo
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 Tbsp. Sichuan or black peppercorns, crushed

Instructions:

1. Heat oven to 400 degrees. Remove some of the excess paper from the head of garlic, leaving the bulb intact. Rub the bulb with 2 tsp. oil and place it in the center of a rimmed baking sheet.
2. In a large bowl, toss the sweet potatoes, onion and cumin seeds with the remaining 2 Tbsp. olive oil. Spread them in a single layer on the baking sheet and roast until the sweet potatoes are slightly caramelized and tender and the garlic has softened, about 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and let rest until the vegetables are cool enough to handle, about 8 minutes.
3. While the vegetables roast, prepare the chile oil: In a small saucepan over medium, heat the neutral oil, taking care not to burn it. (Measure the oil's temperature with a thermometer; it should read about 325 degrees. You could also test the temperature with a Sichuan peppercorn: It should sizzle when tossed in.)
4. Once the oil is hot, remove it from the heat, add the red-pepper flakes, garlic and Sichuan peppercorns. Cover with a lid and let steep for at least 20 minutes. (The oil can be prepared a day ahead of time and stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.)
5. Transfer the cooked sweet potato mixture to a blender. Squeeze the softened garlic pulp out of the cloves and add the pulp to the blender. Add ¼ cup stock to the baking sheet and scrape off any bits that have stuck to the pan. Add the stock and bits to the blender. Add the remaining stock, the black pepper and turmeric to the blender and purée on high speed until smooth and creamy. Taste and add salt as needed. Transfer the soup to a medium saucepan and rewarm over low as needed.
6. Divide the soup among bowls. Give the chile oil a stir and drizzle the soup with a generous Tbsp. or two. Serve immediately.



INDIAN-ISH NACHOS



Time: 30 minutes

Servings: 6-8

Ingredients

For the Chutney

- 1 large bunch fresh cilantro, leaves and tender stems roughly chopped (about 4 cups)
- 1 small Indian green chile or serrano chile, stem removed and roughly chopped
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lime juice (from about 1 lime), plus more as needed
- ¼ tsp. granulated sugar
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt, plus more as needed
- 2 medium Roma tomatoes, cored and finely chopped
- 4 cups sharp Cheddar cheese (about 1 lb.) shredded
- ¼ cup store-bought tamarind sauce (or ¼ cup date syrup or maple syrup whisked with 1 Tbsp. lime juice)

For the Chhonk

For the nachos:

- 1 (15 oz.) can black beans, rinsed and drained
- Kosher salt
- 1 (8 oz.) bag white corn tortilla chips, preferably unsalted
- 1 medium red onion, finely chopped
- ¼ cup ghee or olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. cumin seeds
- Pinch of red chile powder, such as ground cayenne
- Greek yogurt, for serving (optional)

Instructions:

1. Heat the oven to 425 degrees. Make the chutney: In a blender, combine the cilantro, green chile, lime juice, sugar and salt and blend until smooth. If the mixture is too thick to blend, add up to 3 Tbsp. water, a tablespoon at a time, to get it going. Taste and adjust the salt and lime juice, if needed. Set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, lightly mash the beans with a fork (this is so they won't roll off the chips), and season them with salt. On a foil-lined 13-by-18-inch sheet pan, arrange half the chips, followed by half the beans, onions, tomatoes and cheese (in that order). Repeat to make a second layer. Bake for 7 to 10 minutes on the highest rack of the oven, until the cheese is melted and bubbling.
3. While the nachos are in the oven, make the chhonk: In a small pan or a butter warmer over medium-high, heat the ghee. Once the ghee melts (or the oil begins to shimmer), add the cumin seeds and cook until they start to sputter and brown, about 15 seconds. Immediately remove the pan from the heat and stir in the red chile powder. Set aside.
4. Evenly drizzle the cilantro chutney and the tamarind sauce on top of the nachos, followed by the chhonk. Add a few dollops of the Greek yogurt, if using.

SHEET PAN ROASTED CHICKEN & MUSTARD GLAZED CABBAGE



Time: 45 minutes

Servings: 4-6

Ingredients

- ½ cup olive oil, plus more for brushing and drizzling
- 2 Tbsp. stone-ground coarse mustard, plus more for serving
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 tsp. apple cider vinegar
- 4 tsp. cumin seeds
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 1 medium head green cabbage (about 2 ½ pounds)
- 2 medium red onions, peeled, then cut into ½-inch rounds
- ¼ cup drained capers
- 1 ½ tsp. ground coriander
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 6 bone-in, skin-in chicken thighs (about 3 lbs. total)
- Torn fresh parsley, dill or arugula sprigs, for garnish

Instructions:

1. Heat the oven to 425 degrees. Prepare the dressing: In a small bowl, whisk together ½ cup olive oil with the mustard, garlic, vinegar and cumin seeds. Season generously with salt and pepper.
2. Prepare the cabbage: Halve the cabbage lengthwise through the core, then cut each half into 1-inch-thick wedges. (Make sure to continue cutting lengthwise through the core to keep the pieces intact.) You should have about 16 pieces.
3. Add the cabbage wedges to a large (13-by-18-inch) baking sheet. Brush all the wedges with half the vinaigrette, then carefully turn and brush the other side with remaining vinaigrette. Arrange in an even layer, then season generously with salt and pepper. On a separate baking sheet, brush the red onion rounds with olive oil on both sides; season generously with salt and pepper. Add the onion rounds to the cabbage wedges, interspersing the red onion and cabbage and tucking some onion rounds partly underneath. Sprinkle the capers evenly on top.
4. Prepare the chicken: In a small bowl, toss the coriander and cumin with 1 Tbsp. salt and 1 ½ tsp. pepper. Place the chicken on the sheet pan where you oiled the onions and drizzle with olive oil all over, then rub the seasoning all over the chicken. Arrange the chicken pieces on top of the cabbage and onions, skin-side up.
5. Transfer to the oven and roast until the chicken is cooked through and the cabbage is lightly browned in spots and tender, about 35 to 40 minutes. Top with parsley or dill and serve immediately, passing more mustard on the side.

ROASTED CURRIED CAULIFLOWER



Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 40 minutes

Total Time: 55 minutes

Servings: 8

Ingredients:

- 12 cups cauliflower florets (~ 4 lbs.)
- 2 large onions, quartered
- 1 tsp. coriander seeds
- 1 tsp. cumin seeds
- ½ cup olive oil
- ⅓ cup red wine vinegar
- 4 ½ tsp. curry powder
- 1 Tbsp. minced garlic
- 1 Tbsp. paprika
- ¼ tsp. chili powder
- ¼ tsp. ground cumin
- 1 ½ tsp. salt
- freshly ground black pepper to taste
- ⅓ cup chopped fresh cilantro

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.
2. Place cauliflower florets in a large roasting pan. Pull apart onion quarters into separate layers and set aside.
3. Heat a small skillet over medium heat. Cook and stir coriander seeds and cumin seeds in the hot pan until slightly darkened, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, crush coarsely with a mortar and pestle, and transfer to a medium bowl.
4. Add oil, vinegar, curry powder, garlic, paprika, chili powder, cumin, and salt to the crushed seeds; whisk to combine. Pour dressing over cauliflower; toss to coat. Spread in a single layer in the pan and sprinkle with pepper.
5. Roast in the preheated oven, stirring occasionally, about 20 minutes. Add onions and stir thoroughly. Continue to roast, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes more. Garnish with cilantro.

SPICY FUL MEDAMES (FAVA BEANS) WITH OLIVE OIL AND CHILE RECIPE



Time: 10 minutes

Servings: 3-4

Ingredients:

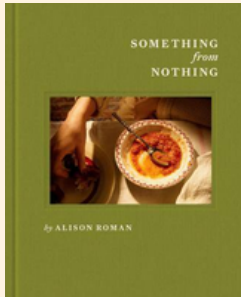
- 4 cloves garlic
- 1 ½ tsp. cumin seeds, freshly toasted
- 2 tsp. chile flakes
- Kosher salt
- 2 (15 oz.) cans fava beans
- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for serving
- 1 Tbsp. tahini
- 3 to 4 Tbsp. lemon juice from 2 lemons, or more to taste

Directions:

1. Put garlic cloves, cumin seeds, chile flakes, and a pinch of salt in a mortar and pestle and crush until seeds are cracked and garlic is in small, flimsy chunks. If you don't have a mortar and pestle, mince garlic very fine.
2. Empty one can of fava beans (with liquid) into a medium saucepan; drain second can and add additional beans, garlic paste, olive oil, and tahini. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring frequently, until liquid retains some brothiness but turns thick and sauce-like, about 5 minutes.
3. Add lemon juice and salt to taste. If desired, mash one third of beans with a potato masher for a thicker stew, or mash all beans for a rich dip. Serve with additional olive oil at the table.

Check Out These Cookbooks!

These cookbooks all contain recipes with spices from this month's kit. Did you know that we have over 350 cookbooks in our collection? Explore recipes from many different countries and cuisines!



Something from Nothing: A Cookbook

Alison Roman

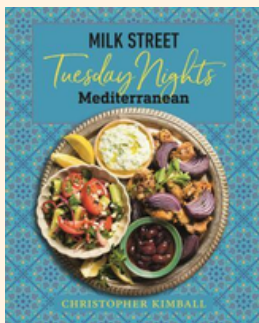
Location in Library:
641.5 ROM



Cook Once, Eat Twice

Nadiya Hussein

Location in Library:
641.555 HUS



Milk Street: Tuesday Nights Mediterranean

Christopher Kimball

Location in Library:
641.563 KIM



Medesque: Everyday Recipes with Mediterranean Roots

Georgina Hayden

Location in Library:
641.591 HAY



Tex-Mex: Traditions, Innovations, & Comfort Food...

Ford Fry & Jessic Dupuy

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Indian-ish

Priya Krishna

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