

SPICE OF THE MONTH

AT THE CROTON FREE LIBRARY

February's spice is sumac!



This month's spice is something you've almost certainly seen in the wild, but you may not have considered it a culinary highlight.

Sumac — specifically the staghorn variety, which is the most common one in our part of the world — grows wild in many places in North America, often on farmland or along roadsides. According to the US Forest Service, 14 species of sumac are native to the United States, out of 150 species total worldwide.

The plant usually looks like a bushy shrub, but it can grow in huge thickets and reach over 30 feet tall. It can be identified by its slim, pointed leaves, and red, fuzzy, cone-shaped flowers that are actually clusters of tiny fruits. It's a favorite of foragers.

In regions of Southern Europe and Western Asia, mentions of sumac showed up in texts written as early as 370 BCE. Scholars Theophrastus and Pliny described the medicinal and aesthetic uses of sumac, in addition to its culinary applications.

Sumac has a tart, fruity flavor. It is an important element of the spice blend za'atar, and it's popular in cocktails and refreshing cold drinks as well as food.

All books listed here are available to check out from the Croton Free Library!

Our sources:

- *The History and Natural History of Spices* by Ian Anderson
- *Northeast Foraging* by Leda Meredith
- *The US Forest Service*: www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/rhus_typhina.shtml

The recipes in this kit are:

- Fattoush Salad with Labneh, from *Fresh & Easy* by Jane Hornby (p. 110)
- Skillet Chicken with Olives and Sumac from *Dining In* by Alison Roman (p. 206)

See our cookbook collection for additional recipes, like:

- Wild Thyme, Sumac, and Sesame Mix from *Arabiyya* by Reem Assil (p.24)
- Cucumber Salad with Sumac and Mint, from *Taste of Persia* by Naomi Duguid (p.47)
- Sumac Roasted Tomatoes with Dried Currants from *Purple Citrus & Sweet Perfume* by Silvena Rowe (p.199)
- Sumac Spritzer (p.15) or Sumac Bitters (p.211), from *The Wildcrafted Cocktail* by Ellen Zachos

What did you cook with your sumac?
Post it on social media with the hashtag
#CrotonSpiceClub and tag us, or send a
photo & description to crotonref@wlsmail.org!

Sumac purchased from Penzey's.