

SPICE OF THE MONTH

AT THE CROTON FREE LIBRARY

June's spice is poppy seeds!

Poppy seeds are sleeper agents of the food world. Small, fairly ubiquitous, recognizable, but not exciting... or are they?

The bluish-grayish seeds that often come to mind are from *Papaver somniferum*, also known as the opium poppy. Before unfurling its vibrant petals, the unopened pods of this flower produce sap that can be used to make opioid drugs. When mature, however, these chemicals become inert — allowing us to enjoy the nutty, crunchy seeds without side effects.

P. somniferum was cultivated from a wild poppy plant native to the Eastern Mediterranean. Early records of people growing poppies in Mesopotamia date back to 3,400 BCE. Ancient Greeks used the plant for both food and medicinal purposes, taking advantage of its properties as a powerful sleep aid and painkiller. As the poppy plant became popular in Middle Eastern countries, China, India, and then eventually Western Europe and Central Asia, it continued to be valued both as a food and as a drug.

Today, poppies are still important plants with multiple uses. As a cultural touchstone, poppy flowers are still pinned to lapels to commemorate and honor veterans and their families — a tradition that began after World War I, when lapel poppies were sold to raise funds. And remember the Wicked Witch of the West cooing, “Poppies will put them to sleep”? Author L. Frank Baum created that iconic scene during a time when opioid products were unregulated and available as over-the-counter tonics for all kinds of ailments, including colic in babies.

Today, poppy seeds are sprinkled on bagels or other breads before baking, paired with lemon in scones and muffins, combined with sugar and butter for strudel and cookies, or blended for salad dressing. And don't sleep on adding them to potato salads and buttered noodles.

**Croton
Free
Library**

All books listed here are available to check out from the Westchester Library System!

Our sources:

- “Poppy” from Britannica: britannica.com/plant/poppy
- *The Oxford Companion to Food* by Alan Davidson
- “Why We Wear Poppies On Remembrance Day” from the Imperial War Museums:
iwm.org.uk/history/why-we-wear-poppies-on-remembrance-day
- “The Power of the Poppy” from the National Museum of American History:
americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/power-poppy-exploring-opium-through-wizard-oz

The recipes in this kit are:

- New Potato Salad with Poppy Seeds and Chives from *Wild Honey & Rye: Modern Polish Recipes* by Ren Behan (p. 55)
- Lemon-Poppy Seed Cake from *Bubby’s Brunch Cookbook* by Ron Silver (p. 66-7)
- Makospato: Poppy Seed Horseshoes from *The Paprikas Weiss Hungarian Cookbook* by Edward Weiss with Ruth Buchan (p. 135)

See our cookbook collection for additional info & recipes, like:

- Plum and Poppy Seed Cake from *Wild Honey & Rye: Modern Polish Recipes* by Ren Behan (p. 141)
- Poppy Seed Danish from *Scandinavian Comfort Food* by Trine Hahnemann (p. 278)
- Dumplings with Plum Compote (p. 356), Poppy Seed Strudel (p. 412), and Poppy Seed Cake (p. 416), from *The German Cookbook* by Alfons Schuhbeck

What did you make with your poppy seeds?

Post it on social media with the hashtag

#CrotonSpiceClub and tag us,

or send a photo & description to

ref@crotonfreelibrary.org!

Poppy seeds purchased from MySpiceSage.