

# SPICE OF THE MONTH

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## December's spice is nutmeg!

The word "nutmeg" refers to three different spices:

- The whole outer fruit of an evergreen tree called *Myristica fragrans*, which originates in the Malay archipelago;
- The kernel or seed in the center of the fruit, which is in your kit this month; and
- The thick, red, fibrous layer covering the kernel, which is known as mace when it's dried.

Nutmeg has deep historical roots. Its first recorded mention is from texts in Iran and China in the third century. It shows up in Indian and Greek texts hundreds of years later, and eventually was desperately sought after by spice traders and European explorers, including Christopher Columbus.

The trees are native to the Banda Islands, nicknamed the "Spice Islands" — a volcanic archipelago hundreds of miles east of Indonesia. In the 1600s, the Dutch East India Trading Company seized control of all the Banda Islands except one: Rhun, which was occupied by the English. These islands were so valuable that, in 1667, the Dutch East India Company traded away the island of Manhattan for Rhun and consolidate its monopoly over the Bandas.

But a century later, French spice traders smuggled nutmeg trees out of the Bandas and into Mauritius, breaking the Dutch monopoly. Now, Indonesia and Grenada are the two chief producers of nutmeg and mace, and the spices are inexpensive and relatively commonplace in many parts of the world.

Nutmeg really does taste best when it's freshly grated. Use the finest holes on a box grater or a microplane grater any time you need some, and then store the kernel in a cool, dark place just like the rest of your spices.

## Sources - nutmeg

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

- *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices* by Andrew Dalby
- Penzeys.com
- The Spice House: [thespicehouse.com/blogs/news/what-is-nutmeg](https://thespicehouse.com/blogs/news/what-is-nutmeg)

These recipes are from:

- *The Meat-Free Monday Cookbook*, ed. by Annie Rigg
- *Rustico: Regional Italian Country Cooking* by Micol Negrin
- *Scandilicious Baking* by Signe Johansen
- *Snacking Cakes: Simple Treats for Anytime Cravings* by Yossy Arefi

What did you cook with your  
nutmeg?

Post it on social media with the hashtag  
**#CrotonSpiceClub** and tag us,  
or send a photo & description to  
[gglazer@wlsmail.org](mailto:gglazer@wlsmail.org)!

**Nutmeg purchased from Penzey's Spices.**

