

SPICE OF THE MONTH

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January's spice is star anise!

New year, new spice! In honor of the north star, we chose star anise this month.

Its pods can be used in both sweet and savory dishes, lending an intense depth of flavor during the cooking process and then being removed before eating. The whole spice in your kits this month is often used in steeping liquids, making aromatic broths, and even creating crafts.

Each star anise pod contains a tiny black seed at the tip of each of its points.

Star anise pods come from a short evergreen shrub native to Southwest China, picked before they're fully ripe and then dried whole in the sun. They're a staple in Chinese cooking and one of the primary flavors in Chinese five-spice powder. The pods' distinct flavor are also key to Vietnamese pho and Indian chai.

Don't try to eat a whole pod of star anise — it's woody and bark-like, and can't be digested — but you can pull out the seeds to try their licorice flavor.

Interestingly, star anise and anise seed are NOT the same! They're from two different plants: star anise is from *Illicium verum* (from the magnolia family and usually grown in Asia) and anise is from *Pimpinella anisum*, (from the parsley family and usually grown in Europe and northern Africa). Anise seeds are similar to fennel seeds and often used in Italian and other European desserts and to create baking extracts after being steeped in alcohol.



Sources - star anise

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

- *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices* by Andrew Dalby
- *The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Spices & Flavorings: A Cook's Compendium* by Elisabeth Lambert Ortiz
- The Spruce: thespruce.com/what-is-star-anise-1328525 and thespruceeats.com/what-is-anise-995562

These recipes are from:

- *One Spice, Two Spice* by Floyd Cardoz
- *Nadiya Bakes: Over 100 Must-Try Recipes for Breads, Cakes, Biscuits, Pies, and More* by Nadiya Hussain
- *Tangy Hot Tart & Sweet* by Padma Lakshmi
- *Masala & Meatballs: Incredible Indian Dishes with an American Twist* by Asha Shivakumar

What did you cook with your
star anise?

Post it on social media with the hashtag
#CrotonSpiceClub and tag us, or send a
photo & description to
gglazer@wlsmail.org!

Oregano purchased from Penzey's Spices.