



SPICE OF THE MONTH

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July's spice is saffron!

Saffron is one of the world's most expensive and precious spices, worth more than its weight in gold — but you only need a little bit of it to flavor a whole dish.

Part of its high cost is due to the difficulty of its harvest. The threads we think of as saffron are the stems of the purple saffron flower, which blooms only once per year. Only the flower's stigmata — the reddish-orange pollen-germinating part of the pistil — is used to make the dried spice. Each flower has only three stigmata, which must be removed and dried by hand, so saffron's harvest is time-consuming and expensive.

Saffron is an ancient spice. It was depicted in wall paintings in the Greek town of Akrotiri, in the islands of the Aegean Sea, which were preserved after the eruption of the Santorini volcano in 1600 BCE. Homer lauded it in the *Iliad* nearly 1000 years later; it was used in Greece and Rome as a dye and a perfume.

Now, most of the world's saffron is produced in Iran, but it is still cultivated in many areas throughout Europe and Asia. Kashmiri saffron is highly prized as the rarest kind of this precious ingredient.

Saffron's taste is subtle yet distinctive, and many cookbook authors struggle to put it into words. It's a slightly floral taste, also described as earthy or grassy.

Naomi Duguid, author of *Taste of Persia*, describes saffron as "a sign of generosity. All the effort and expense involved in saffron production means that adding saffron to a dish makes it special." (p. 26. Duguid's recipe for saffron water is included in this packet!)

Sources - saffron

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

- *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices* by Andrew Dalby
- *Encyclopedia Britannica*: [britannica.com/story/why-is-saffron-so-expensive](https://www.britannica.com/story/why-is-saffron-so-expensive)
- *Taste of Persia* by Naomi Duguid

These recipes are from:

- *East: 120 Vegan and Vegetarian Recipes from Bangalore to Beijing* by Meera Sodha
- *Feast: Food of the Islamic World* by Anissa Helou
- *Sunday Suppers at Lucques* by Suzanne Goin
- *Taste of Persia* by Naomi Duguid

What did you cook with your
saffron?

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

Saffron purchased from Penzey's Spices.