

# SPICE OF THE MONTH

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## January's spice is bay leaves!

These are Turkish bay leaves, which come from bay or laurel trees growing in the mountains of western Turkey.

The trees originated in Asia Minor, but they now grow almost exclusively in the Mediterranean. Bay leaves were prized in ancient Greece and Rome; accomplished athletes and officials and artists were honored with crowns of bay and laurel. ("Poet laureate" comes from laurel!)

Bay leaves impart a floral, spicy, tea-like flavor. Some cooks use California bay leaves, which have a piney taste and come from a shrub-like evergreen plant.

Bay leaves are unusual, because they're usually added to a soup, sauce, or stew early in the process and left the whole time to infuse their flavor. (Most dried spices are typically added at the end of the cooking process.)

They're versatile and used in savory dishes, pasta sauces, and sometimes desserts. And they are a part of many different cultures' traditional spices, including the French bouquet garni and the spice mix in garam masala from Northern India.

Fresh bay leaves have sharp edges, so they shouldn't be chewed or eaten plain. If they're minced, they can be used immediately. When dried, the leaves should be kept in an airtight container, in a cool, dark place, for no longer than six months.

## Sources - bay leaves

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

- *The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Spices & Flavorings: A Cook's Compendium* by Elisabeth Lambert Ortiz
- Penzeys.com
- *Spiced* by America's Test Kitchen

January is National Soup Month, so all three of the included recipes are for soup! The recipes are from:

- *Carla Hall's Soul Food: Everyday and Celebration*
- *One Spice, Two Spice: American Food, Indian Flavors* by Floyd Cardoz
- *The Soupbox Cookbook* by Jamie Taerbaum and Dru Melton

What did you cook with your bay leaves?

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).

**These Turkish bay leaves were purchased from Penzey's Spices.**