

Happy Holidays from Allspice to Za'atar David Christopher, M.H.

The holiday season is a wonderful time to indulge in amazing foods and treats. Herbs and spices play an intrinsic role in distinguishing this seasonal fare. These herbs and spices not only contribute incredible taste but also are positively healthful. Let's examine some of these seasonal herbs and spices from A to Z.

We'll start with the Caribbean Allspice found principally in Jamaica, where it is referred to as simply pepper. This spice tastes like a mix of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. Not only does it have the taste of cinnamon but it also lowers blood sugar like cinnamon. Similarly it helps heat the body in hypothermia as does nutmeg. Dr. Christopher used cloves constantly for the freshening of



the breath. Allspice is also a breath freshener. All of the above spices can be used as appetite stimulants and all are effective in relieving intestinal gas. They are also essential for my favorite holiday beverage, wassail.

Ginger is an aromatic, sweet-spicy penetrating herb, and where would we be without gingerbread cookies? Medicinally ginger is used for motion sickness, headaches, indigestion, blood circulation, heart attack (if cayenne isn't readily available) and abdominal cramps.

Horseradish can have religious and seasonal significance but can also be very beneficial medicinally if we over-do the candy and egg-nog. There is nothing better than grated horseradish for clearing mucus from the sinuses, by simply smelling the fumes when it is freshly grated, or by consuming therapeutic amounts of wasabi (its Asian counterpart).

What would Christmas be without candy canes? The peppermint oil used to flavor candy canes can be applied to painful teeth when one has overindulged with sweets. Peppermint oil can also be used for painful joints, muscles and headaches. Peppermint tea is specific for digestion and is employed as both a stimulant and relaxant. If holiday guests are driving you crazy, peppermint has also been employed historically for insanity.

Just the smell of pine can put most people into a holiday mood. Pine needles infused into water in a clear capped jar, heated by the sun, is an excellent source of Vitamin C. The sticky pine pitch is anti-biotic and the new soft needle growth is purported to contain testosterone.

There are many herbs and spices for the holidays but let me end with Za'atar, a spice blend from the middle-east. It is made by combining two tablespoons minced fresh thyme, 2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds, two teaspoons of ground sumac spice, and ½ teaspoon of salt. This spice blend is added to olive oil and spread on breads and added to hummus. If you can't find ground sumac spice then orange and lemon zest, and maybe capers, could be substituted. I hope everyone has a healthy holiday season!

David Christopher *is a Master Herbalist and the director of The School of Natural Healing. He also co-hosts the popular radio show "A Healthier You" and is a popular international teacher and lecturer.*