

Spice world

Every issue, we look at one particular spice and how to use it. This issue, it's that Christmas favourite, cinnamon

Story: McCormick Senior Home Economist, Michelle Thrift

The scent of cinnamon is sweet and pungent. It's related to Christmas not only as a culinary sweet spice for flavouring baked goods but also as an essential oil for cinnamon-scented candles, cinnamon-scented pinecones and ornaments.

Traditionally, cinnamon has been mentioned in ancient writings and, as the first spice mentioned in the Bible, along with cassia, as an ingredient of holy anointing oil. It was highly valued among ancient nations along with things like frankincense and myrrh.

Cinnamon today is a widely used culinary spice in the cuisine of a number of cultures around the world. It is a popular spice all year 'round, however, it is by far the most popular spice in the lead up to Christmas.

In Australia, we use up to 40 per cent more cinnamon during the festive period compared to the rest of the year.

Traditionally, in Western countries, Christmas is the time for giving and sharing sweet treats.

Classic festive recipes include foods like gingerbread, puddings, fruit cakes and fruit mince pies, all of which contain the distinctive spice.

Where does it come from?

Cinnamon is the dried bark of several tropical evergreen trees of the genus *Cinnamomum*. A thin layer of bark is stripped from the tree and dried in the sun, which makes it curl into the familiar quill shape of stick cinnamon.

Once considered a prized gift for royalty, cinnamon has a long and colourful history. Ancient Egyptians used it for cosmetics and embalming. The Romans believed cinnamon to be sacred and burned it at funerals. Cinnamon was also one of the first spices sought in the 15th century European explorations, and some say it indirectly led to the discovery of America. Biblical references focused on its sensual fragrance; Solomon, in a song about his beloved, revelled in her cinnamon-scented clothing.

Today's cinnamon is sourced from four countries: *Cinnamomum burmannii*, the most common form, hails from Indonesia. Saigon cinnamon, *Cinnamomum loureiroi*, from Vietnam is considered the finest because of its high volatile oil content. Chinese cinnamon,

Cinnamomum cassia, is the base of Chinese Five Spice blends. And *Cinnamomum verum*, from Sri Lanka, has a mild flavour and distinctive citrus note that makes it popular in cooking.

How much to use?

To ensure it does not overpower other flavours, we suggest you use these general guidelines. When cooking with 500g of red meat, use 1 cinnamon quill. With similar quantities of white meats and vegetables, use $\frac{1}{2}$ cinnamon quill. And for baking, generally two teaspoons of cinnamon powder per 500g of cake batter is recommended.

Cinnamon is often paired with sweet treats and chocolate, and complements most baking. Cinnamon has a personality suitable for savoury dishes as well. It is great in curries, Moroccan tagines, preserved lemons and also works well with vegetables such as pumpkin and squash.

What else does it do?

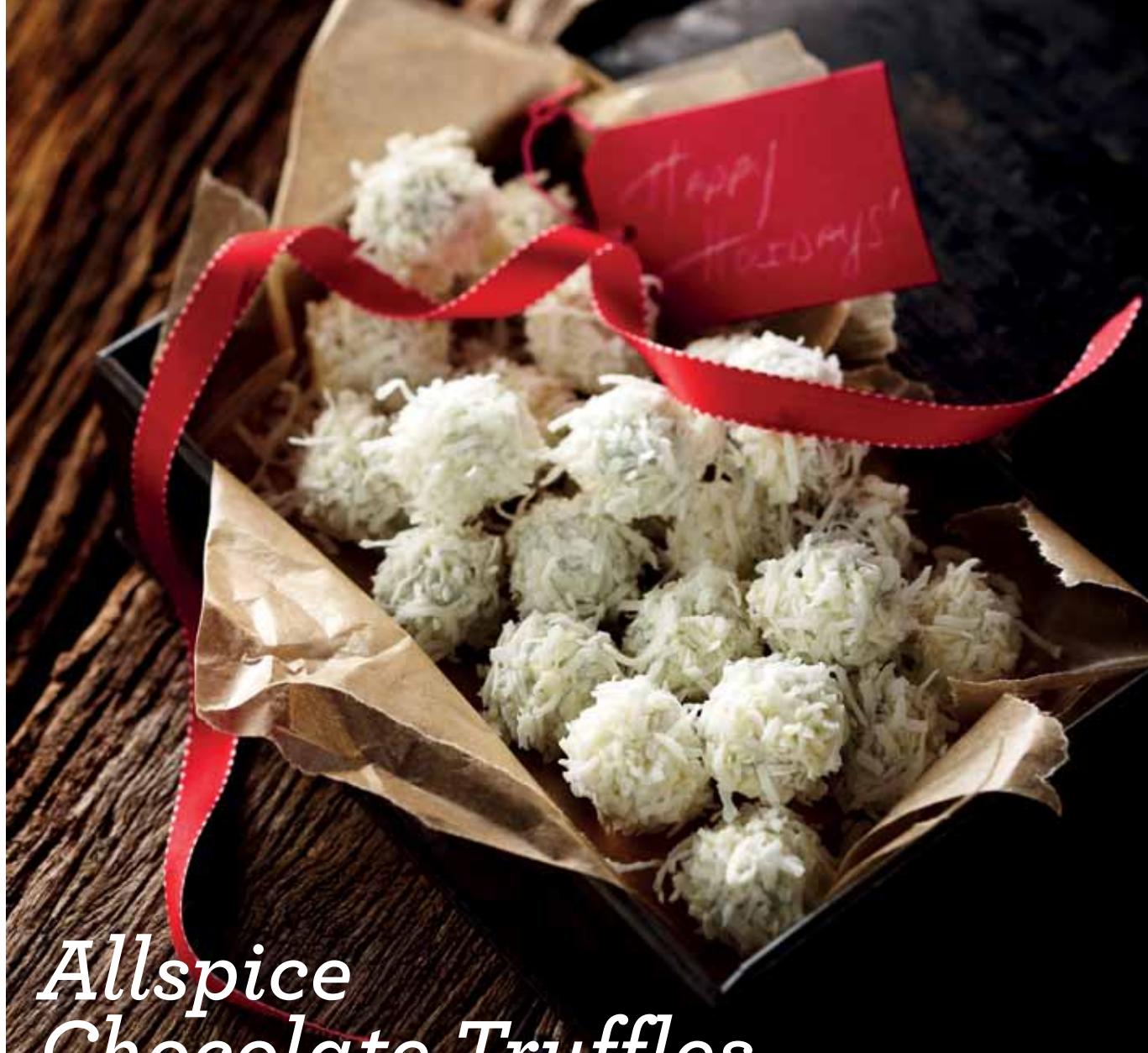
Cinnamon is also well-known for its medicinal purposes.

It contains flavonoids and cinnamic acid, which are potent antioxidants. It also contains antibacterial properties, linked to supporting healthy blood sugar levels.

At breakfast time, add cinnamon to cereals, sprinkle on toast or add to banana smoothies. Some like it sprinkled over their morning latte, and it also adds a great balance to Chai tea.

For more great recipes and information, visit mccormick.com.au.





Allspice Chocolate Truffles

Makes 30 small balls



Allspice Chocolate Truffles

Prep and cook time:
15 mins, plus 1 hour
refrigeration and 5
minutes cooking time.
Difficulty: easy

Ingredients

200g plain cooking
chocolate
50g butter
2 medium egg yolks

2 tsp McCormick®
ground allspice
1 tsp McCormick®
ground cinnamon
1 tsp McCormick®
vanilla sugar
250g white
chocolate, melted
200g shredded coconut

Method

Melt chocolate and
butter and stir in egg
yolks and spices. Mix

well. Beat until the
mixture thickens. Place
in a refrigerator until the
mixture has hardened
slightly about 1 hour.

Shape the mixture into
 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 tsp balls. Dip set
truffles in melted white
chocolate and coat with
shredded coconut.

Add the zest of $\frac{1}{2}$ orange
to the truffle mix for
added zing.

Hints and Tips

Adults only – add 2 tbsp
dark rum to mixture at
step 1, before putting it
into the fridge.



Fruit Mince Pies

Fruit Mince Pies

Prep and cook time: 30 minutes plus overnight soaking of fruit and 20 minutes cooking.
Difficulty: Easy

Ingredients

Mince: 375g dried mixed fruit
1 green apple, peeled and grated
1 cup brown sugar
50g butter, melted
Grated rind and juice of 1 orange
2 tsp McCormick® ground mixed spice
2 tsp McCormick® ground cinnamon
2 tsp McCormick® ground nutmeg

Pastry: 2 cups self-raising flour, plus extra for kneading
185g butter, cubed
2 egg yolks
2 tbsp lemon juice or iced water
Icing sugar, to dust

Method

Place fruit, sugar, butter, liqueur, orange rind and juice and spices into a bowl and mix well. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Next day, preheat oven 200°C (fan-forced). In a large food processor, add flour, butter, and process until mixture resembles breadcrumbs. With motor running, add egg yolks and lemon juice until dough starts to form a ball. Remove dough and place on a sheet of greaseproof paper. Lightly knead until dough comes together. Add 1-2 tablespoons of flour to dough



if too wet. Dough should be soft and damp but not sticky. Place another sheet of greaseproof paper over dough and roll dough between two sheets of greaseproof to about 3mm thick. Cut 12 rounds to fit into patty pans and cut 12 star shapes for pie tops. Place pastry rounds into a greased 12-hole small patty pan and spoon 2-3 tsps prepared fruit mince into each. Top each with a star-shaped pastry. Bake for 20 minutes until golden. Leave to cool completely in pans. Dust with icing sugar.

Hints and Tips

Adults only - Add 60ml liqueur (Cointreau, brandy, rum) to fruit mixture to add extra depth of flavour to your mince.

Makes 12 pies



White Christmas

Makes 40 small squares



White Christmas

Preparation time: 25 minutes, plus chill time at least four hours

Ingredients

600g white chocolate melts, melted
1 1/2 cups rice bubbles
100g red and green glacé cherries
1 cup crushed nuts
50g white chocolate

1 cup sultanas
1 cup (90g) desiccated coconut
1 teaspoon McCormick® mixed spice or ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon McCormick® ground ginger

Method

Line a 30cm x 20cm (base) baking pan with baking paper.
In a large bowl, mix all

ingredients together and pour mixture into the prepared pan, pressing down gently with a large metal spoon.

Refrigerate for 4 hours or until set.

Turn slice onto a chopping board. Using a knife that has been dipped in hot water, cut into squares. Melt 50g white chocolate and drizzle over slice.

Hints & Tips

Add a teaspoon of vanilla essence to the initial mixture to enhance the flavour. Also, lightly roast nut mix beforehand for depth of character. Use plenty of almonds.