

Spice *world*

Ginger is a tropical spice, as much at home in exotic Asian foods as it is in traditional baked goods

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Ginger is a tropical spice that has a wonderful pungent, citrus flavour that many of us associate with baked goods. Long cultivated by the ancient Chinese and Hindus, ginger was one of the first Asian spices known in Europe. Its Latin name, *Zingiber*, means "shaped like a horn" and refers to the roots, which resemble deer antlers.

Ginger was introduced to England before 1066 and was at first used mainly as a baking spice. Elizabeth I had a fancy for gingerbread, which her cook made into the likeness of her courtiers – the prototype for our traditional gingerbread man. During the 15th century, gingerbread became a gift of love and respect. In the 1800s, ginger was commonly sprinkled on top of beer or ale then stirred into the drink with a hot poker – the origin of ginger ale.

The origins of wild ginger are unclear, but it is believed to be native to the region between India and East Asia. Today China, India and Nigeria are the principal sources of dried ginger while crystallized ginger comes from Australia.

Best combinations

Ginger is one of the warming spices and its flavour is characterised by its unique combination of lemon-citrus, soapy and musty-earthly flavour tones. It is available dried, in whole pieces,



ground, roasted and crystallized.

While commonly used in baked goods such as cakes, biscuits, gingerbreads and slices, it is also used in savoury dishes from various global cuisines. It is often found in Moroccan dishes as an ingredient in traditional tagines, couscous, and in almond and honey desserts. It is also included in various Asian dishes and often used in Indian curry powders.

Ginger also has a natural affinity with fruit, vegetables and meat, making it the perfect go-to for spicing up a glaze for salmon, carrots or sweet potatoes.

Medicinal ginger

You may feel comforted by the soothing smells of ginger-spiked baked goods, but what you might not know is that ginger has a long history of other comforting properties. For centuries, ginger was used as a natural remedy for a variety of conditions, especially soothing seasickness and morning sickness.

Ginger is said to promote sweating and relieve colds. A teaspoon of ginger in warm water is said to guard against travel sickness. Ginger is also believed to be an aid to digestion and is also thought to help stimulate blood circulation.

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