

Seasonal Eating
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Spice Up the Holidays
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When we think of holiday spices, what comes to mind is cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg. The familiar, traditional flavors. I love these flavors and use them in everything from pumpkin bread and cinnamon apple pie to holiday cider and clove studded ham. But today I want to introduce you (or reacquaint you) with three holiday spices that will take your holiday cooking to another level!

Let's start with a little more familiar one and that is crystallized ginger. Ginger – we know this one at the holidays with gingerbread and gingersnap cookies. Mostly we use ground ginger in these treats. Crystallized ginger though can take it up a notch. Fresh ginger root is used in lots of Asian cuisine for a zippy, spicy heat in sauces and stir fries. Now take that chopped fresh ginger and cook

it in a sugar syrup and you have crystallized ginger – sweet with a punch of spicy flavor. You can chop it up and put it in baked goods like cookies and scones. One of my favorite ways to use crystallized ginger is to put it into my favorite cranberry sauce to pour over cream cheese for an easy holiday appetizer with crackers. Beautiful red color and the sweet, tart, zip of the cranberries and ginger.



Next, let's examine star anise. Star anise pods are brown with eight points that look like a star with seeds inside. They come from a tree native to China and Vietnam and are often used in these cuisines. The star anise has a somewhat licorice flavor, but don't let that scare you. I hate black licorice but these give off a deep, exotic flavor. I have used the pods to flavor chicken broth for chicken noodle soup along with ginger root and a cinnamon stick which simmers together for about 10 minutes. You can also add the pods to simmered cider drinks or with the liquid to poach pears (either a sugar syrup or red wine). A couple of pods is plenty to flavor quite a bit of liquid as they are fairly strong.

Finally, there is cardamom. This warming spice is wonderful in cookies, cakes and breads. You can use it alone or in combination with the other warming spices like cinnamon and ginger. My favorite recipe using cardamom is a holiday yeast bread studded with candied fruits. Usually I braid the bread into a loaf, but today I turned it into sweet rolls with a sugary filling flavored with the cardamom, ground ginger and a little cinnamon.

Holiday spices make the foods special this time of year and fill the house with the aroma of goodness. Add some variety to your holiday cooking this season with some new spices.

Visit the Bedford County Extension website for more recipes and information about seasonal eating (bedford.tennessee.edu).

Cardamom Sweet Rolls

3 cups flour, divided
1 packet yeast
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon ground cardamom
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter, cubed
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup honey
1 egg
1 cup fruitcake mix (candied fruits, chopped), divided
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup softened butter
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cardamom
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground ginger
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
Powdered sugar and milk

In a small saucepan, heat milk, butter and honey to melt the butter and let cool until just warm. Pour into large bowl and add yeast, whisking to mix. Let sit a few minutes and when cool enough, whisk in egg. In another bowl combine 1 cup flour, $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon cardamom and salt. Add to wet ingredients along with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruitcake mix and beat until it forms a batter. Let rest a few minutes. Stir in enough remaining flour to form a dough (dough will be sticky). Turn onto a lightly floured surface and knead until smooth and elastic, about 6-8 minutes. Place in a greased bowl, turning once to grease top. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled, about 45 minutes. Turn onto a lightly floured surface and pat into a 12"x14" rectangle. Spread with butter. In a small bowl combine remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fruitcake mix, sugar, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cardamom, ginger and cinnamon. Sprinkle evenly over butter. Roll up long edge and seal. Cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch slices and place in 2 greased cake pans. Cover and let rise until doubled, about 30 minutes. Bake at 375 degrees for about 15 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool slightly and drizzle with glaze of powdered sugar and milk.