

## Thai Curry and History of Spices

Curry is one of Thailand's favorite dishes, but in the Thai language kari (curry) refers, however, to only one of many combinations of spices. It contains turmeric or saffron among other things and can be recognized by its yellow color. The Thai housewife blends in a mortar and pestle many other combinations of spices, each with its own name. For our purposes we can call them all curry. In its many forms, curry is common to India and all of Southeast Asia, including Malaya, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma.

The consumption of spices is as old as civilization. Most of the spices we know today were used in ancient Egypt, China, India, and Sumeria, not only to add zest to food, but also to preserve meat and to conceal the evidence of that already spoiled. Spices have always been greatly valued. Until modern times many of the best known, for example nutmeg and cloves, came only from Southeast Asia. Men sailed uncharted seas swarming with Malay and Chinese pirates, dared die lands of savage headhunters, ripped their vessels on hidden reefs; and died in the lonely seas in quest of these spices.

In ancient times people utilized spices in many more ways than we do today. The Egyptians used spices and other substances in the preparation of their mummies. Spices played an important role in the making of perfumes, and in passages of the Bible we find scents referred to as "spicery." One of the many recipes for making holy anointing oil given to Moses by God was exceedingly spicy:

Moreover the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take thou also unto thee the chief spices, of flowing myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty, and of sweet calamus two hundred fifty, and of cassia five hundred, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil an hin: and thou shalt make it an holy anointing oil, a perfume compounded after the art of the perfumer: it shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint therewith the tent of meeting, and the ark of testimony, and the table and all the vessels thereof, and the candlestick and the vessels thereof, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all the vessels thereof, and the laver and the base thereof. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy. - Exodus

Using more familiar units of measure, this recipe would read 18 pounds of myrrh, nine pounds of cinnamon, nine pounds of sweet calamus, 18 pounds of cassia (Chinese cinnamon), mixed with 1| gallons of olive oil. The quantity and fragrance of this paste must have been staggering, for it covered quite a bit of territory. As early as 300 B.C. caravans went from Europe to the Middle East and then to China, taking spices from Levantine exchanges to trade for silk. Roman ships sailed to Asia for spices, and the number of Roman coins found in far-off places tells us that the trade of those days must have been pretty lively indeed.

We owe a great debt to the Arab caravans for it was they who transported pepper, cloves, cardamon, and nutmeg across Asia. The military expeditions of the crusades brought thousands of Europeans into contact with the Arab Orient and its wonders, and spices became an indispensable ingredient in European life. Venice became the great market of world trade. Cloves and nutmeg from the Moluccas, cinnamon from Ceylon, pepper from Malabar, myrrh from Arabia, and ginger from India came to Venice and were passed on north and west.

Spices in Europe were as valuable as gold. Pepper was deemed to be the greatest of royal gifts and was worth its weight in gold. Taxes could be paid in pepper. Spices were also widely used in the making of medicines, and a strong tasting medicine was believed to have greater curative powers than a pleasant tasting one. Spices, of course, were vital in cooking too.

## About the Author

Vipp Rongsit is an editor specialize in Thai food & Thai recipes.

[Thai Salad](#) | [Thai Dessert Recipes](#) | [Thai Food](#)

Source: <http://www.serverforever.com>