Intro I like to think of cooking as an art, and spices are one tool that we can use to create new masterpieces in the dishes we prepare. So today we're going to chat about how we can harness the power of spices to elevate our cooking to Greater Heights.

If you don't know how to store and use spices properly you could be missing out on all of their amazing flavors and health benefits. So in today's video, we're going to explore three essential steps when it comes to making the most out of our herbs and spices. We're going to chat about how to purchase them wisely, store them appropriately, and use them skillfully to maximize their freshness and nutrition, all while making dishes with bold and dynamic flavors.

we've also created a free article in a free downloadable PDF, I'm going to link those for you below but for now just sit back and relax and let's learn all about how to use spices like a pro.

Where to buy

When it comes to buying our spices, quality and freshness are everything, so it really matters where we're buying our spices, what in particular we're buying and how much of it we're buying. When it comes to where to buy, in my opinion, I think the fresher the better and this is why I usually like to hit up our local Asian supermarket, the reason being they're usually super busy, so I know this means they're also restocking their shelves frequently with fresh spices. They also just have like a massive selection of spices to choose from, it feels like being a kid in a candy store and if you're overwhelmed and you don't know where to begin, we'll chat in two seconds about which spices you might want to consider buying, but it can also be a fun exercise, Robin and I do this sometimes where we'll just go to the grocery store and we'll pick up a new spice that we haven't tried before and find a way to experiment with it that week.

What to buy

When it comes to which spices to buy, that's entirely up to you but there are certain Classics that I keep defaulting to, and if you want to make any of our pick-up limes recipes, there's certain spices we just use on repeat. So, excluding salt and pepper, in order from what we use most often to kind of lesser often is first up, ground cinnamon followed by onion powder, paprika powder, garlic powder cumin, turmeric, oregano, coriander and curry powder. So, if you're not sure where to start, these are a safe bet. And then, when it comes to something like black pepper, cumin, and coriander you might wonder if getting the whole seeds or the ground version is better. They each have their pros and cons. The ground spices are super convenient, but they do have a shorter shelf life, whereas whole spices have a longer shelf life and they can be enjoyed whole or ground up, and if you do grind it up just before using it, you're going to be super charging the flavor in your dish. So, in my opinion, purchase both if you can, otherwise go for the ground spices if you're looking for convenience and whole spices if you're looking for versatility.

How much to buy

And then when it comes to how much to buy, now this is something we're going to chat more about in a little bit, but spices and herbs tend to lose their nutrition and flavor potency over time. So it's better to buy in smaller amounts and more frequently, especially if it's a spice that you're not using that often, and before you purchase anything always, check the expiration on the back of the packaging, just make sure you're not buying anything that's going to expire within the next year.

Nutrition & antioxidants in spices.

Storing spices correctly is incredibly important when it comes to preserving their nutritional value and taste, so let's explore that in a little bit more detail.

We all know by now that fruits and vegetables are incredible sources of antioxidants that help protect our bodies from damage, in turn reducing the risk of certain diseases. Well, spices and herbs also contain potent antioxidants and in pretty high concentrations, so when looking at the antioxidant content of a particular food, normally you look at something that's called its ORAC value. Essentially all you need to know is that the higher the ORAC value is, the more antioxidants that food has. So if we were to put things into perspective, blueberries, which are often hailed as a superfood for their antioxidant content, these have an ORAC value that's just shy of 4700 per 100 grams, whereas dried basil has an ORAG value that's 61 000., that's 13 times as much. Then turmeric and cinnamon have nearly double that amount, oregano has an ORAC value of 175 000, only to be topped by ground clothes. And naturally, no one is having 100 gram portion of these spices in one sitting, that would be absurd, we're just adding little sprinkles here and there, but I think what I'm trying to share is that these values add up, especially if you're enjoying these herbs and spices with every single meal. So be generous with that ground cinnamon that's in your porridge, enjoy the turmeric in your smoothies, go wild with the basil and oregano in your pastas, you're going to be loading up on some wicked antioxidants.

Storing spices properly

So, it's cool to know that spices and herbs are a great source of antioxidants but what does that have to do with storing them. Well pretty much everything actually! You see, antioxidants are easily broken down when they're exposed to air, light, and moisture, and similarly there are these volatile oils that are in our herbs and spices, and these are what contribute to their incredible flavor and Aroma, but these also break down when exposed to the same elements. So, if we're not storing our spices and herbs properly, we're not only losing in their nutritional value, but we're also losing their flavor potency. So, what do we do about it? Essentially store them properly. It's best to store them in well-sealed airtight containers that are in a cool dry place. So, try to keep it away from windows, stoves ovens, and dishwashers. When you've just used a spice, be sure to close the lid right away, so moisture isn't getting in there from whatever it is that you're cooking, and always use clean and dry utensils when measuring spices. Just remember that adding moisture to our spices can cause them to spoil and go bad faster.

Expiration & freshness.

Lastly Expiration & freshness. I'd recommend labeling your containers with either the date that you bought your spice or the expiration date, just so you're keeping track of its freshness. As a general rule of thumb, whole spices are the most fresh in the first year, whereas ground spices and dried herbs are the most fresh in the first six months, but both can last up to a couple of years at least as long as they're stored properly. Another way that you can tell that your spices are getting old and then it's time to replace them is just by looking at them. So, I've got two different kinds of chives here, this one is freshly purchased and you can see from the color that it's got this beautiful green hue to it and it smells delicious, whereas these chives have been sitting in our pantry for too long, they've kind of turned this grayish color and adding this to a dish is not going to be doing it any favors so it's time to swap these ones out.

Become a student.

All right now we can delve into the exciting part which is how to use our spices to elevate our dishes.

If you're new to using spices at first, I'd say just try learning from recipes that you trust, act a little bit like a student, pay attention to what's being used, how much of that spice is being used, I think that's sometimes where some of the confusion comes from, do I add a quarter of a teaspoon, a tablespoon? You'll start to notice things like ground cloves, nutmeg ,just a little pinch is good, oregano, cinnamon, you can add a whole lot more than that, essentially by following recipes, you'll start to notice certain patterns in how much and what is being used.

Learn cuisine spice combos.

From there it can help to familiarize yourself with certain spice combinations in certain Cuisines, like for example Mexican inspired dishes, commonly use spices like cumin, paprika, chili and oregano, while Indian inspired dishes incorporate warm spices things like turmeric and ginger, as well as spice blends like curry powder and Garam Masala. Sticking to these tried and tested spice combinations is going to make sure that your dishes are tasting deliciously exquisite.

Know when to add.

so now that we know when to add know which spices to use, the next question kind of becomes, well, when do I use it when do I add it into a dish?  
So, let's explore that a little bit starting first with whole spices. So, these take a little bit longer to cook, a little longer to release their flavor into a dish, so naturally you'll want to add them earlier on in the cooking process. It's also important to know about something called blooming which is essentially where we cook our spices first in a little bit of oil or fat, it helps to extract the fat-soluble flavor compounds that are in the spices. I kind of like to think of it as waking up spices that were previously asleep. So, when it comes to whole spices, if you're going to be using them, again you're adding it earlier on, cooking it for a minute or two, ideally in an oil or a fat until they start to pop and become fragrant. At this point, we can add in things like onion and garlic, cooking those until they're translucent or gold before adding in the ground spices. Ground spices have a very high surface area, they will burn, so you don't want to cook those for very long at all. So, usually you want to stir quite vigorously, toasting them for 30 to 60 seconds, just to wake them up before adding in any other remaining ingredients or liquids. And you've heard me say this in previous recipe videos, but just don't add your liquids too soon. Toasting your spices even if it's just for a few seconds can make a world of flavor difference. But all in all, I feel like cooking is like an art, it requires creativity, skill and a passion for the craft. So, welcome to the world of spices, enjoy the process, make mistakes because that's how you learn, and grow and I hope that some of the tips that we shared in today's video makes you feel a little bit more confident when it comes to using spices. As a reminder again, we do have a free downloadable PDF. Link is in the description, it goes even more into detail about different spices, what dishes they pair well in, and thanks so much for hanging with me today friends, I really appreciate it. Happy cooking, Pick Up Limes signing off, we'll see you in the next video.