**Description:** The most valuable cardamom comes from the rainforests of Malabar, obtained from a rush-like shrub growing to a height of 6 ½ feet, furnished with sturdy rhizomes and stems covered in lanceolate leaves. The inflorescences, shorter than the sterile stems, are racemes with a dozen or so yellow-tipped, blue-streaked flowers. The fruits are trilocular, nut-sized capsules with 4-8 seeds. The species grows wild in the tropical mountain forests of southern India. India and Sri Lanka produce more than 1,000 tons of the spice. Native to India but now established in other tropical regions, including parts of Indonesia, China and Latin America.

**History:** In its homeland, cardamom was mentioned by the ancient Vedic texts of medicine, whose traditions went back more than 1,000 years before Christ. They considered it a fine cure for such diverse ailments as obesity and dysuria. By the 4th C B.C., it was imported to Greece, where it acquired its European name. This arose by combining the term kard (from cardamom, a bitter garden cress) with the Oriental word amomon for a simpler kind of spice.

But the later Romans were responsible for making cardamom popular and using it extensively in good cooking. No other classic spice has such a patchy geographical distribution and variety of uses.

**Cultivation:** Cardamom bush is a relative of the ginger plant and grows nearly 10 feet high, its pod-bearing stalks sprawling along the ground. In the early 19th century it began to be cultivated, at first by sowing seeds on cleared forest soil. Now, pieces of the trunk are used to raise plants that are transferred to fields. Since it is a forest species, the fields must be shaded with trees.

A cardamom plantation keeps the owner busy. Flowering continues for a long time and the fruits ripen for several months. They have to be harvested when about ¾ ripe, being plucked...
individually. A plant bears fruit from an age of 2-3 years. It does so for at least 10-15 years, before giving way to a more productive descendant. The harvest depends greatly on the weather, plant disease (particularly the mosaic viruses), insect damage and so on. However, an area of one hectare should yield more than 100 kilograms of dried capsules.

Once plucked, the capsules are washed, then dried for some days in the sun (becoming almost white) or for a day and night in a heated room (which leaves them greener). About 60% of their final weight consists of seeds.

**Constituents:** Volatile oil (terpinyl acetate, cineol, limonene, linalool, linalyl acetate, zingiberene, borneol, camphor, pinene, humulene, caryophyllene, carvone, eucalyptole, terpinene, sabinene)

**Properties:** eases stomach pain, carminative, aromatic, warming digestive stimulant, antispasmodic, orexigenic, sialagogue

**Energetics:** pungent, a bit bitter & sweet, warm, dry

**Meridians/Organs affected:** spleen, kidneys

**Aromatherapy:** The plant has many medicinal uses in Indian Vedic medicine and the oil is used in perfumes and incense and claimed as an aphrodisiac in India. It can be used as a refreshing invigorating bath.

**CHARACTERISTICS:** From the fruit: a colorless to pale yellow liquid with a sweet-spicy, warming fragrance and a woody-balsamic undertone.

**EXTRACTION:** Essential oil by steam distillation from the dried ripe fruit.

**BLENDS WELL WITH:** rose, olibanum, orange, bergamot, cinnamon, cloves, caraway, ylang ylang, labdanum, cedarwood, neroli, and oriental bases in general.

**USES:**
- **Digestive System:** anorexia, colic, cramp, dyspepsia, flatulence, griping pains, halitosis, heartburn, indigestion, vomiting
- **Nervous System:** Mental fatigue, nervous strain

Extensively used as a fragrance component in soaps, cosmetics and perfumes, especially oriental types.

**BLENDING:**
- **Digestive:** 5 drops cardamom, 3 drops ginger, 3 drops parsley
- **Urinary:** 5 drops cardamom, 4 drops celery, 3 drops fennel
- **Mood Uplifting:** 5 drops ylang-ylang, 4 drops caraway, 4 drops sandalwood, 2 drops cardamom in 1 Tbsp carrier oil. Massage the formula into the upper chest, back of the neck and shoulders

**Culinary:** World’s third most expensive spice behind saffron and vanilla. Dried fruits (seeds) are sold whole or ground. Some Indian grocery stores sell cardamom seed pods, either black (sun dried, deeply flavored), green (milder flavored, dried indoors in large kilns) or white (bleached versions of the green). The whole seed-pod is used as the spice more often than the individual seeds it contains. The aroma of cardamom is unique and unmistakable; its flavor is sweet but clean with a hint of eucalyptus. Buy the pods whole and crush them to release the seeds if these are needed separately, but remember that the pods themselves cannot be eaten.

Cardamom gets its flavor and aroma from oil of cardamom, a pale yellow liquid that contains spicy tasting, camphor-scented eucalyptol, lemony flavored limonene and terpinene, and peppery borneol. Cardamom is used in curry powders, baked goods and candies, and its oil is used to flavor liquors and pharmaceutical drug products.

Cardamom is one of the essential spices in Indian food, crucial in biryanis, pilaus, dals and curries, particularly those of northern India. Cardamom is an important component of spice mixtures such as garam masala, and also imparts its perfumed flavor to many Indian sweet dishes and beverages: ground cardamom is sprinkled on to lassi, the delicious yogurt drink. Cardamom is much used throughout the Middle East as well, and has been adopted by northern Europe and Scandinavia for use in cakes, pastries, mulling mixtures and pickles.

To bring out the best flavor of cardamom seeds before using in savory dishes, the seeds should be dry-roasted. Split open the pod and
remove the sticky brown-black seeds. Heat a skillet, add the seeds, and cook until roasted.

An after-dinner infusion of cardamom pods is not only refreshing and flavorful, but an aid to digestion as well. In the Middle East, strong black espresso-type coffee is often flavored with ground cardamom. To prepare an infusion, add 12 whole crushed pods to 6 ¾ cups boiling water. Add a strip of orange peel and leave to infuse for 10 minutes. Add 2-3 tablespoons tea leaves. Infuse as desired, strain, and serve with hot milk and sugar.

In the Near East during the 16th century, people began to blend their coffee with cardamom. This habit—which survives especially in Saudi Arabia—was also fashionable a hundred years later in Italy. Cardamom had long been famous as an aphrodisiac and seemed able to eliminate the bad effects of coffee drinking.

Use when poaching pears, baking apples, or add ground cardamom to a fruit salad. Delicious ice cream can be made by infusing the hot cream or milk with bruised cardamom pods.

**Nutritional Profile:** One teaspoon ground cardamom has 6 calories. It provides 0.2 g protein, 0.1 g fat, 1.37 g carbohydrates, 8 mg calcium and 0.3 mg iron.

**Medicinal:** Its digestive properties have made it popular as an after-dinner infusion, and it acts as a breath freshener when chewed. It is used in India for many conditions, including asthma, bronchitis, kidney stones, anorexia, debility and weakened Vata. The herb has a long-lasting reputation as an aphrodisiac.

Cardamom treats gasralgia, enuresis (involuntary urination), warming, antimucus stimulant to add to lung tonics. Take directly in a powder of from ¼-1 tsp at a time.

Cardamom is very high in cineole, a potent expectorant compound and a central nervous system stimulant. In cases of emphysema, add a teaspoon or two of powdered cardamom to fruit juice or tea.

In Chinese medicine it: 1) increases the Qi and replenishes deficiency; restores the lungs, spleen and nerve and generates strength; lifts the spirit and rids depression; 2) Warms and invigorates the stomach and intestines; frees spasms and dries mucous damp; awakens the appetite, settles the stomach and quells vomiting; 3) Stimulates the lungs, expels phlegm and clears the head; 4) antidotes poison and resolves contusion.

Use: The most effective way to use Cardamom for the above range of effects is in essential oil form. It may be combined with a carrier oil and massaged into the skin externally or taken internally.

**TCM:** Tonifies kidney-yang; nourishes bone and sinew; warms kidney and spleen

Indications: cold-spleen and cold-kidney symptoms; deficient kidney-yang; vomiting and diarrhea due to internal cold

Dosage: decoction: 3-10 grams, in two doses, on an empty stomach. Powder: plain, infusion, or capsules: 3-9 grams, in three doses, on an empty stomach

Contraindication: stomach ulcers

**Toxicity:** Prolonged handling of cardamom seeds may cause contact dermatitis (itching, burning, stinging, reddened or blistered skin) or make your skin more sensitive to sunlight.

**Recipes:**

**Fruit Salad with Cardamom**

2 Tbsp sugar

½ cup orange juice

½ tsp ground cardamom

2 oranges, segmented or sliced

1 apple, diced

1 pear, diced

2 bananas, sliced

2 plums, diced

Assorted soft fruit for garnish such as grapes, cherries, blueberries, and raspberries

Fresh mint for garnish

In a small saucepan, combine the sugar and ½ cup water over medium heat. Simmer until the sugar is dissolved. Leave to cool. Add the orange juice and cardamom. Combine the oranges, apple, pear, bananas, and plums in a glass bowl and pour over the cardamom mixture. Chill for at least 30 minutes, garnish with the soft fruit and mint, and serve. (The Encyclopedia
Orange and Cardamom Salad
10 oranges
2 Tbsp orange flower water
½ tsp ground cardamom
generous pinch of grated nutmeg
½ cup sugar
½ cup water confectioner’s sugar

Peel the oranges, removing all pith and
reserving the peel from one or two. Divide into
segments. Put them into a serving bowl and
sprinkle with the orange flower water and spices.
Take the reserved peel, make sure no pith is
adhering to it., and cut into julienne strips.
Blanch in boiling water for 3 minutes. Melt the
sugar in the water in a pan. Add the blanched
strips of orange peel and poach slowly for 4-5
minutes. Drain the strips on a wire rack. To
serve, scatter the peel over the oranges and sift
over a dusting of confectioner’s sugar. Serves 6

Vanilla and Cardamom Ice Cream
1 ¼ ups milk
1 vanilla bean
2/3 cup heavy cream
6 green cardamoms, crushed
4 egg yolks
½ cup sugar

Put the milk and vanilla bean in a pan
and bring to the boil. Remove from the heat and
leave to infuse for 10 minutes. Remove the
vanilla bean. Heat the cream with the cardamom
pods and leave to infuse. Whisk the egg yolks
and sugar in a double boiler or in a bowl set over
a pan of boiling water until thick and pale. Add
the warm milk and stir briskly to blend
thoroughly. Keep stirring until the mixture
thickens. Remove the cardamom pods from the
cream—the seeds don’t matter—and add the
cream to the custard. Cook and stir for a further
10 minutes until the mixture thickens again.
Freeze in an ice cream machine or a shallow
container, beating the ice cream after 1-2 hours,
then freeze until firm. (The Complete Book of
Spices, Jill Norman)

Thai Beef Curry
3 Tbsp oil
Bring the rice to a boil with the milk in a heavy pan then allow to simmer for an hour or until mushy. Mash the rice roughly with a whisk while still on the heat. Blend the almonds into the evaporated milk and add to the rice. Stir until thick and creamy. Add the sugar, raisins and pistachios. Sprinkle the cardamom powder over and stir well. Serve chilled, garnished with rose peals. (The Indian Spice Kitchen)

**Mushroom Curry**
1 lb mushrooms, sliced  
1 onion, sliced  
3 cloves garlic, sliced  
2-4 tomatoes, chopped  
1 tsp ground ginger  
¼ tsp chili powder  
½ tsp ground cumin  
seeds from 3 cardamoms, crushed  
1 tsp garam masala  
1 Tbsp fresh cilantro chopped  
½ cup tomato juice or water  
oil or ghee  
salt  

Start by heating the fat and cooking the onion until it is translucent. Then put in the garlic followed by the mushrooms andauté these until they begin to soften. After that, add the tomatoes, ginger, chili powder, cumin, cardamoms and garam masala, the cilantro leaves and salt. Stir these in well. Now pour in the water or juice and cook gently for 20-30 minutes until the mushrooms are very soft. Serve with rice or chapattis (The Spices of Life)

**Meatballs in Cream Sauce (Malai Kofta)**
1 ¼ lb lamb, minced  
4 slices bread, soaked in water and squeezed dry  
1 tsp cayenne powder  
1 tsp turmeric powder  
1 tsp garam masala powder  
1 tsp minced ginger  
1 tsp minced garlic  
2 Tbsp white poppy seeds  
salt  
pinch of baking soda  
1 tsp raisins  
corn oil for frying  

6 Tbsp corn oil  
4 large onions, sliced  
2 Tbsp ginger, chopped  
2 Tbsp garlic, chopped  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
8 green cardamom  
1 tsp cayenne powder  
1 tsp turmeric powder  
1 tsp garam masala powder  
6 Tbsp tomato puree  
1 tsp sugar  
salt  
1 1/3 cups light cream  

**Garnish:** 2 Tbsp cilantro chopped

To make the meatballs, knead the lamb with all the other ingredients except the oil. Make equal sized balls, pressing them hard to bind the ingredients. Steam for 10 minutes or until cooked. Heat 4-5 inches of oil in a kadai or wok and sauté the meatballs until brown. Take care while lowering them into the hot oil because they will splatter. Then, to make the sauce, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil and sauté the onions, ginger and garlic. Blend to a paste in a food processor. Heat the remaining oil in a heavy pan and add the cumin and cardamom. Stir once. Then add the onion paste and sauté until golden. Add all the powder spices and tomato purée. Sprinkle in the sugar and salt and keep stirring until well blended. The oil should separate from the sauce. Add a little water if necessary, to achieve a creamy consistency. Remove from the heat, stir in the cream and gently slide in the meatballs. Reheat before serving, adding a little water if required. Serve sprinkled with cilantro (The Indian Spice Kitchen)

**Sautéed Spinach and Onions**
2 Tbsp vegetable oil  
2 Tbsp unsalted butter  
1 tsp fennel seeds  
4 brown or green cardamom pods  
1 cinnamon stick  
3 onions, thinly sliced into half-rings  
one 2-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and julienned  
1 garlic clove, minced  
3 lbs spinach, rinsed and stemmed
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp ground cayenne pepper
½ tsp Garam Masala

Heat the oil and butter in a large saucepan over medium heat until hot but not smoking. Add the fennel, cardamom, and cinnamon and stir. Add the onions and sauté for 10 minutes, or until they turn a light brown. Add the ginger and garlic and cook, stirring, for about 15 minutes, until the onions are golden brown. Be careful not to burn them. Stir in the spinach, cover, and reduce the heat to low. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes, or until the spinach is thoroughly wilted. Add the salt and cayenne pepper, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, for 20 minutes. Stir in the Garam Masala and cook for 5 minutes more. Remove and discard the cinnamon stick. (Adriana’s Spice Caravan)

Cardamom Crumble with Apricots
8 oz dried apricots
8-9 cardamom pods
1 ¼ cups boiling water
1 tsp white sugar
2 oz butter, diced
2 oz plain flour, sifted
2 oz Demerara (light brown) sugar
a little lemon juice

Preheat oven to 400F. Put the apricots and 6 or 7 of the cardamom pods in a saucepan and pour over them the boiling water. Cover and leave to soak for a couple of hours, or overnight, then simmer gently until the apricots are soft—between 25 and 45 minutes, depending on how dry the apricots were and how long they were soaked. Leave to cool. Remove the black seeds form the remaining cardamom pods and grind them with the white sugar in a spice or coffee grinder or pepper mill. Reserve. For the crumble topping, rub into the butter the flour, Demerara sugar and half the ground cardamom mixture until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Chill until needed. To assemble, discard the cooked pods and mash the apricots to a coarse puree. Add lemon juice to taste. Spread over the bottom of a lightly greased gratin dish or four individual ramekin dishes. The puree should be no more than ¾ inches thick. Sprinkle the surface with the remaining ground cardamom mixture and top with the crumble. Bake in a preheated oven for 20-30 minutes until the crumble topping is crisp and pale gold. Serve warm with lots of light cream. (The Hot and Spicy cookbook)

Cardamom Cordial
A fifth of muscatel wine
½ vanilla bean or 2 tsp vanilla
2 Tbsp grated orange peel
4 whole cardamom pods, crushed
4 dashes angostura

Blend 3-4 days. Strain. (Herbally Yours)

Cardamom and Ginger Chicken Wings
24 chicken wings (about 4 lbs)
½ cup brown sugar
6 Tbsp dark soy sauce
¼ cup Chinese bean sauce
¼ cup hoisin sauce
4 scallions, thinly sliced
¼ cup chopped fresh coriander
2 Tbsp mirin or dry sherry
2 Tbsp sesame oil
4 tsp minced fresh ginger
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 tsp ground cardamom
1 tsp salt
½ tsp Five-Spice Powder

Cut each chicken wing into 3 pieces: main bone, second joint, and wing tip. Discard the tips. Set aside. Combine the sugar, soy sauce, bean sauce, hoisin, scallions, coriander, mirin, sesame oil, ginger, garlic, cardamom, salt and Five-Spice Powder in a large glass bowl. Stir to mix well. Add the chicken and stir until well coated. Cover and refrigerator for 8 hours or overnight, stirring once or twice if you’re awake. Place a foil square on a work surface, with one corner pointing at you. Place 4 chicken pieces in the center and drizzle about 1 Tbsp of the marinade on them. Fold the bottom corner up and over the wings. Fold in the sides. Roll up securely. Repeat with the remaining chicken. In a deep-fryer or cast-iron skillet, heat the oil to 350F. Carefully deep-fry the chicken, 1 or 2 packages at a time (since the oil will bubble furiously, for 6-8 minutes, or until the chicken is cooked through. Drain the packages on paper
towels and serve hot and unopened. (Adriana’s Spice Caravan)

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