

Did You Know?



Star anise – Illicium verum

- *The eight-pointed seed pod from an evergreen tree native to Southwest China and Vietnam, is the spice known as star anise. This small evergreen tree is in the magnolia family, Schisandraceae.*
- *Star anise has been used in China for flavoring and medicine for over three thousand years.*
- *The seed pods are harvested before ripening (green) and sun-dried, resulting in the rich brown color.*
- *Both the seeds and the pods contain the flavor and are finely ground together. When used in recipes whole, they should be removed before serving.*
- *It is one of the five spices in the blend, Chinese five-spice.*
- *The deep licorice-like aroma has subtle sweet and herbal notes.*
- *The flavor is used in sweet, spicy and savory dishes, including baked goods, chilled desserts, sauces, beverages and even red meats.*
- *The liquors absinthe, Sambuca, and pastis all have infused star anise flavoring.*
- *Though the flavor is similar, it is not related to anise seed. However, both plants have anethole, a compound responsible for the anise flavor in both seeds.*
- *Historical medicinal uses included Chinese herbalists using star anise as a stimulant, an expectorant and to treat indigestion to European healers using it in teas for rheumatism and chewing the seed for indigestion.*
- *Though there is now a synthetic way to manufacture it, star anise contains shikimic acid which is one of the primary components of the influenza-fighting drug Tamiflu.*
- *Research continues on extracts from star anise, including testing antifungals and antimicrobial compounds.*
- *According to Chinese folklore, finding a star anise with more than eight points was considered good luck. Star anise was also considered protection against the “evil eye”.*
- *While similar to *Illicium verum*, the seeds of Japanese star anise, *Illicium anisatum* are quite toxic.*