

Sugar & Spice: Now that Tastes Nice!



What's the first flavor that comes to mind when you hear the word "popcorn?" Butter? Salt? Caramel? For many years, those were the most common popcorn partners. But no more! Now recipes abound for bold and flavorful snacks such as Five-Spice Popcorn, Cajun Popcorn, Asian Popcorn, and even Gingerbread Popcorn.

The modern-day palate has become more sophisticated, with an increasing appreciation for the cuisines and ingredients of other cultures, including exotic spices. Enticing dishes such as Chili-Lime Shrimp and Wasabi-Encrusted Tuna now dot our menus and spice up our everyday lives. We've grown up, in a food sense, and now there is a demand for creative combinations of all things hot, spicy, salty and sweet, from our appetizers through our desserts and snacks.

In fact, flavor combinations are all the rage. On a typical day, we may start with spicy chai tea at breakfast, enjoy mango-curry chicken salad at lunch, and indulge in an after-dinner bite of dark chocolate studded with candied ginger. It seems there is a new appreciation for spices, from A to Z.

Always the understudy and never the star. That sums up the sad life of exotic spices in American cooking for many years. Relegated to the dusty upper shelves of the spice rack, spices such as cardamom, curry and cumin were passed by as cooks reached for the preferred cinnamon, garlic powder and salt. But, the spice rack is no longer just a decorative kitchen accessory. Spices that formerly languished in the wings, are finally taking center stage.

Spices work particularly well in popcorn recipes since they easily pair with sweet ingredients to yield a complex depth of flavor. Increasingly health-conscious cooks continue to look for ways to add taste appeal to snacks like popcorn, a natural whole grain low in calories and fat.

Try delicious Sugar and Spice Popcorn; the caramel taste of brown sugar is complemented by a zesty hit of chili powder, paprika and cumin. Or, spice up your snacking repertoire with Sweet Garam Masala Kettle Corn. The deeply aromatic flavors are cooked right along with the popcorn for a fully infused sweet and spicy kick.

Sugar and Spice Popcorn

Two is the magic number in this recipe, proving that twice is nice when it comes to spice!

2 quarts (8 cups) air-popped popcorn
2 tbsp. brown sugar
2 teaspoons chili powder
2 teaspoons paprika
2 teaspoons ground cumin
Butter-flavored cooking spray

Combine brown sugar, chili powder, paprika, and cumin in small bowl and mix well. Place cooked popcorn in bowl; spray lightly with cooking spray and sprinkle with spice mixture. Toss to mix until kernels are coated. Store in airtight container.

Serves: 3

Sweet Garam Masala Kettle Corn

Garam masala is the most aromatic of all Indian spice blends. Look for it in the international aisle of most supermarkets.

½ cup popcorn kernels
¼ cup sugar
¼ cup vegetable oil
1 teaspoon garam masala, Indian spice blend
1 teaspoon salt

- In a large heavy-bottomed pot (with a lid), place popcorn, sugar, oil, garam masala and salt. Cover and place over medium heat until corn begins to pop.
- Once corn begins to pop, shake pot constantly over heat. When popping slows, remove pot from heat and transfer popcorn to a bowl to serve.

Yield: 10 cups

