

December Spice Club: Sumac



Suggested Reading

available to request on the Minerva catalog or cloudLibrary app

Anas Atassi, *Sumac: Recipes and Stories from Syria*

Freddie Bitsoie, *New Native Kitchen: Celebrating Modern Recipes of the American Indian*

Dave Hamilton, *Family Foraging: A Fun Guide to Gathering and Eating Wild Plants*

Reem Kassis, *The Arabesque Table: Contemporary Recipes from the Arab World*

Claudia Roden, *The New Book of Middle Eastern Food*

Sean Sherman, *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen*

Marie Viljoen, *Forage, Harvest, Feast: A Wild-Inspired Cuisine*

Sumac

Ground sumac is a traditional Middle Eastern and Mediterranean spice. The name “sumac” is attributed to the Aramaic word *summaq*, meaning “dark red.” Sumac spice is made from the dried and ground shrub berries of the flowering sumac plant. It was known for its diuretic and anti-flatulent properties in Rome some 2,000 years ago and was used by Romans to add tanginess to dishes before lemons made their way into Europe. In North America, Indigenous peoples and early pioneers used sumac as traditional medicine for ailments like sore throat and stomachache.

Staghorn sumac will be most familiar to Mainers, with its skyward-facing red cones of velvety berries and leafy arms; we can find it growing profusely along ditches and around the edges of forests.

Ground sumac has a tangy, slightly bitter, appealing flavor reminiscent of lemon juice, and like citrus or salt, the acidic twang elevates the natural flavors of meats, vegetables, and hummus. Think also about adding it to marinades, dips, salad dressings, stews and pita wraps; or use to complement the strong herbal notes of sage, thyme and mint. Add it as a bright pop of flavor on deviled eggs or sprinkled over popcorn. The possibilities are endless! Store in an airtight container and use within a few months to a year.

FORAGING FOR SUMAC

Please use this as an introduction and do your own additional research before embarking on any foraging escapades!

Avoid poisonous sumac, which has white berries and is largely found in swampy areas. BackyardForager.com waits until mid-July to begin harvesting sumac and avoids doing so if there's been a recent rain (rain or pre-washing your sumac berries will rinse the lemony acids off the fruit). It's suggested to remove any seeds, twigs, or velvety hairs that coat the fruit before culinary use.

Sean Sherman of *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* writes: “To use sumac as a seasoning, harvest the clusters and pull the berries from the branches. Spread out on a piece of parchment to dry for about a day. Then place the dried berries in a bag and crush. Store in an airtight container out of direct sunlight.”

One Pan Sumac Chicken Thighs

Lyubomira, CookingLSL.com
Makes 6 servings

6 small bone-in chicken thighs
2 oranges
1 tablespoon ground sumac
1 teaspoon salt
pinch of black pepper
3-4 garlic cloves, crushed
¼ cup olive oil
6 sprigs fresh thyme or 1 teaspoon dried thyme

Preheat oven to 375°F. In a bowl, combine olive oil, salt, pepper, sumac, juice from 1 orange, garlic cloves, and thyme. Stir to combine.

Dip chicken into marinade to coat evenly.

Slice the second orange into rounds. Place in the bottom of a skillet. Arrange chicken thighs on top.

Bake for 45 minutes, until the temperature of the chicken reaches 165°F and the skin is crispy. Cook for longer if needed. Serve and enjoy!



Dried Sumac Lemonade

Neha Mathur, WhiskAffair.com

SUMAC SYRUP

2 cups water
2 cups sugar
3 tablespoons ground sumac

FOR EACH LEMONADE

¼ cup sumac syrup
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice

FOR SERVING

club soda
seltzer
lime wedges
mint leaves

Make sumac syrup:

Combine water and granulated sugar in a medium saucepan. Heat over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the sugar is dissolved. Reduce the heat to low and cook for 4-5 minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat. Add ground sumac to the saucepan, stir to combine, and allow to infuse for 15 minutes.

Strain the syrup through a fine-mesh strainer. This syrup is good enough to make 8-10 glasses of lemonade.

Make the sumac lemonade:

Add 4-5 ice cubes to a tall serving glass. Pour ¼ cup of sumac syrup into the glass. Top with 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice and top the glass with club soda or seltzer. Garnish with a slice of lime and a few mint leaves and serve immediately. You may also add a splash of white gin, vodka, or tequila to make a lovely cocktail for your next house party.