

January Spice Club: Grains of Paradise



Grains of paradise, a captivating spice rooted in West Africa, infuse dishes with a warm and citrusy charm. Harvested from the *Aframomum melegueta* plant, these seeds, also known as the "African Pepper," offer a unique blend of pepper-like heat with hints of citrus and florals.

With a flavor reminiscent of a cross between black pepper and cardamom, grains of paradise are a versatile addition to both savory and sweet recipes. Historically used in medieval Europe as a pepper substitute, this spice has experienced a modern resurgence, finding favor among chefs and home cooks alike.

In West African cuisines, grains of paradise feature prominently in stews, soups, and grilled meats, showcasing their ability to add depth to traditional dishes. Beyond the continent, these seeds have become a sought-after ingredient, adding complexity to spice blends, rubs, marinades, and even craft cocktails and specialty beers.

With its rich history and unique flavor profile, this spice bridges culinary traditions across continents. Whether gracing the tables of West African households or enhancing global gastronomy, grains of paradise invites you to savor a taste that transcends borders, connecting cultures through its aromatic allure.

African Peanut Soup with Grains of Paradise

WorldSpice.com

Serves 1-2 | Prep time: 35 mins. | Cook time: 30 mins.

“This West African soup recipe combines sweet potatoes and peanut butter with grains of paradise. The flavors balance beautifully and are a wonderful showcase for this exotic spice.”

2 tsp whole Indian (or regular) coriander seed	2 lbs sweet potatoes, peeled, quartered and sliced thin
1 tsp grains of paradise	3 ½ cups vegetable broth
2 tbsp butter	2 cups water
1 onion, chopped fine	3 tbsp peanut butter
¼ tsp kosher salt	Fried shallots or onions for garnish
1 tsp brown sugar	
3 garlic cloves	

In a heavy skillet over medium-high heat, toast the (Indian) coriander and grains of paradise, stirring occasionally, until fragrant and lightly browned, about 3-4 minutes. Transfer to a small bowl and allow to cool. Grind in a mortar & pestle or electric mill.

In a large Dutch oven, melt the butter over medium heat. Stir in the onion, salt and sugar and allow to cook about 5-7 minutes until translucent and aromatic. Add the garlic and 2 teaspoons of the spice mix and cook about 30 seconds more.

Add the sweet potatoes, vegetable broth, water and peanut butter and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer until the sweet potatoes are fork tender, about 25 minutes.

Turn off the heat and allow the soup to cool slightly.

Working in batches so the blender is never more than half full, transfer the soup to a countertop blender and purée until smooth.

Return the soup to the pot and warm gently before serving.

Garnish with a sprinkle of fried onions and a sprinkle of the remaining spice mix.

Apple Spice Bundt Cake with Rum Glaze

Alton Brown, altonbrown.com

Serves 12 | Prep time: 30 mins. | Cook time: 2 hr. 15 mins.

2 Granny Smith apples, about 8 oz each	½ tsp kosher salt
3 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for the pan	3 sticks unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus extra for the pan
1 tsp baking powder	2 cups granulated sugar
2 tsp ground grains of paradise	1 cup light brown sugar
1 tsp freshly ground nutmeg	3 large eggs, at room temperature
½ tsp ground ginger	1 tsp vanilla extract
¼ tsp ground cardamom	¾ cup pecans, chopped
¼ tsp ground allspice	1 ½ oz crystallized ginger, finely chopped halves
¼ tsp ground rosemary	
⅛ tsp ground star anise	

FOR THE GLAZE

2 ¾ cups confectioners' sugar
2 tbsp dark rum
3 tbsp water
2 tbsp Turbinado sugar, for sprinkling

Place a rack in the middle of the oven and heat oven to 325°F. Lightly butter a bundt pan and dust with flour, tapping out the excess.

Chop one apple into 1/4-inch dice, leaving the peel on. Grate the other apple on the large holes of a box grater. Set both aside.

Whisk the flour, baking soda, salt, and spices together in a large bowl. Combine butter, granulated sugar, and brown sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer and using the paddle attachment, beat on medium until the mixture is pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes.

Whisk together the eggs and vanilla and slowly add, with the mixer on low speed, to the butter and sugar. Add the flour. Sift onto a paper plate, fold it like a taco, and feed it into the mixer, one-third at a time and beat on low just until combined after each addition. Stir in the apples, pecans, and ginger.

Transfer the batter to the prepared bundt pan, the batter is thick and will fill the pan. Bake for 75 minutes, rotating the pan after 30 minutes. The cake is done when it pulls away from the sides of the pan, springs back when pressed and the internal temperature reaches 205°F.

Cool the cake in the pan on a rack for 30 minutes. Invert and remove the cake from the pan. Cool completely on the rack before glazing.

Combine the powdered sugar, rum, and water in a small mixing bowl and whisk until smooth. Pour the glaze onto the bundt cake and sprinkle with turbinado sugar. Let the glaze set for at least 30 minutes before serving.

Suggested Reading

Grains of paradise don't feature heavily in our cookbook section; recipes are more easily searchable online. That said, do check out our new African-inspired cookbooks!

Anto Cocagne & Aline Princet, *Saka Saka*

Pierre Thiam & Lisa Kitamura, *Simply West African*

Those interested in vegan Ghanaian food would do well to check out Afia Amoako's website thecanadianafrican.com or her Instagram at [@eatwithafia](https://www.instagram.com/eatwithafia) for lovely, narrated food essays and excellent eats.