

# Cinnamon

## I. What is it?

- A. Cinnamon is a spice obtained from the inner bark of a tropical evergreen tree.
  - 1. Cinnamon is harvested by growing the tree for two years and then coppicing it (which means cutting it down so more shoots can grow). The next year, about a dozen shoots will form from the roots.
  - 2. The bark is then cut off and used.
  - 3. It is harvested during the rainy season when the bark is more pliable.
  - 4. When dried, it curls into long quills. These quills are sold as cinnamon sticks are they are ground and sold that way.
  - 5. The compound cinnamylaldehyde in the bark is what gives the scent and flavor
- B. It is available throughout the year, but many people like to use the fragrant, sweet, and warm taste of cinnamon in the winter months.
- C. There are two types of cinnamon: Ceylon Cinnamon and Cassia Cinnamon, each valued for their own qualities.
  - 1. Ceylon cinnamon is more expensive and has a sweet taste, milder than Cassia.
    - a. Ceylon cinnamon only uses the thin inner bark, and thus has a finer, less dense, and more crumbly texture than Cassia.
    - b. It is mostly produced in Sri Lanka, India, Madagascar, Brazil, and the Caribbean.
  - 2. Cassia cinnamon is the less expensive variety. It has a much stronger flavor than Ceylon cinnamon.
    - a. All of the layers of the bark are used to make this cinnamon.
    - b. Most of the cinnamon used in the United States is cassia cinnamon.
    - c. This is mostly produced in China, Vietnam, and Indonesia.
- D. Cinnamon is used in both sweet and savory foods.
  - 1. It is available in either stick or powder form

2. The sticks can be stored for longer (approximately one year versus six months for ground), but the ground powder has a stronger flavor

## **II. History of Cinnamon**

- A. Cinnamon is one of the oldest spices known and is mentioned in Chinese writings as early as 4000 years ago. (2800 BC)
- B. Egyptians used cinnamon in their embalming process.
- C. Even the bible mentions cinnamon (Proverbs 7: 17-18 and Exodus 30: 22-25).
- D. In Medieval times, it was used as a medicine for various ailments, including a sore throat.
- E. Its source was kept mysterious in the Mediterranean world for centuries by the middlemen who handled the spice trade, but cinnamon is native to Sri Lanka, which is in India.
- F. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch seized the world's largest cinnamon supplier by bribing and threatening the king.
- G. During the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the French and the English joined the battle for controlling the cinnamon trade.
- H. By the 1800's the cinnamon wars stopped when other countries found it was easy to grow. Cinnamon is now grown all over the world in tropical climates.

## **III. Health Benefits of Cinnamon**

- A. Cinnamon contains manganese, iron, and calcium.
- B. It also contains many "phytochemicals" which are substances found in plants that aren't vitamins or minerals, but have properties that benefit our health.
- C. A few small studies have shown that cinnamon might provide some degree of improved insulin resistance.
  1. It should not be used as a treatment for improved blood sugar control, but rather just an "enhancement".
  2. Benefits have been shown with as little as ½ teaspoon daily.
- D. It has been said that just smelling cinnamon helps to boost brain activity. In one study, participants had better scores related to attention and memory after taking a whiff of cinnamon.

- E. Preliminary studies indicate it may be helpful in reducing blood cholesterol levels.
- F. Manganese is a mineral that helps to keep your bones strong and healthy along with the calcium in cinnamon. Manganese also acts as an antioxidant and helps protect your cells against damage from “free radicals” (free radicals are substances our bodies normally produce and need to get rid of because they cause damage to cells).
- G. As a spice used for foods, cinnamon is safe. However, cinnamon supplements have not been proven effective and may even be dangerous. Cinnamon essential oils, extracts and other concentrated forms can be harmful. Anyone with kidney, liver, central nervous disorders or those taking blood thinners should absolutely avoid cinnamon supplements...again, using it as an ingredient in cooking is not a problem.

#### **IV. Fun Facts**

- A. In the middle ages, cinnamon was only affordable to the wealthy elite of society. A person’s social rank could be decided by how many spices they could afford.
- B. Cinnamon was ranked in value with gold, ivory, and frankincense.
- C. Two teaspoons of cinnamon is only about 12 calories.
- D. Cinnamon, chili powder, and salt are the most common seasonings in American homes.
- E. Cinnamon was often used at Roman funerals. It was said that the Roman Emperor, Nero, burned a year’s supply of cinnamon for his wife’s funeral.
- F. Indonesia is currently the leading producer of cinnamon in the world.
- G. There is a mythological creature called the Cinnamon Bird.  
*(There was an ancient belief in something called the Cinnamon Bird that supposedly lived in Arabia and used cinnamon to build its nests. Herodotus wrote that these birds flew to an unknown land to collect the cinnamon and took it back with them to Arabia. The Arabians got the cinnamon from the birds by tempting them with large chunks of raw meat. The birds took the*

*heavy pieces of meat back to their nests, which caused the nests to fall and the cinnamon to rain down and be collected by the people.)*

- H. Hypocras is a centuries-old spiced wine that is spiced with cinnamon. Hypocras (named after Hippocrates who is believed to have invented it) is generally not produced commercially anymore, though it is still produced in small amounts in some regions of France.
- I. If you stacked every tin of cinnamon Watkins has sold since 1895, it would be 12,411 times taller than the Empire State Building!
- J. Cinnamon and other strong-smelling spices have been used to repel ants.
- K. The Snickerdoodle, a sugar cookie that's rolled in cinnamon-sugar before baking, is believed to originate from early New England cooks. They had quite a penchant for giving whimsical and puzzling names to their dishes, apparently for no other reason than the fun of saying it...other examples include Graham Jakes, Jolly Boys, Branble, Tangle Breeches, Cry Babies, Jumbles, Plunkets and Kinkawoodles.

## **V. Tips for using and storing cinnamon**

- A. Cinnamon should be stored in a cool, dark, and dry place.
- B. You can extend the shelf life of cinnamon by putting it in the refrigerator.
- C. Add 1/2 teaspoon to hot oatmeal or cold cereal, or to pancake batter.
- D. Mix 1/2 teaspoon into 2 tablespoons peanut butter and spread onto celery sticks.
- E. Microwave 1 cup soy milk and 1 teaspoon honey for 1:30, then add 1/2 teaspoon. Or simmer a stick and honey in soy milk for 5 minutes on stove.
- F. Stir 1/2 teaspoon into plain yogurt.
- G. Sprinkle 1/2 teaspoon over sweet potatoes or carrots.
- H. Toss 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon over broiled grapefruit or bananas.
- I. Add 2 teaspoons to a store-bought rub for grilled chicken or pork.

- J. Coat 2 cups of raw nuts with a mix of 1/4 cup honey and 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon and roast at 350F for 15 minutes.
- K. Shake three dashes into your favorite fruit smoothie.
- L. Sprinkle 1/2 teaspoon straight into your coffee, latte, or cappuccino.