**Create Your Own Herb & Spice Shakers**

Why make your own?

1. **Tailored to your own taste preferences**
* You can leave out a spice/herb that you aren’t fond of or add a little more of one you really like.
1. **Tailored to your own sodium needs**
* Leave out the sodium completely, or work toward reducing it.
1. **Tailored to your own antioxidant “needs”**
* Maybe “needs” isn’t the right word. But, if you know a particular herb or spice has shown promise in protecting against a disease, you may be interested in using more.
* Likewise, if you are trying to watch your vitamin K and sodium intake, you may want to use caution in the amount of certain herbs you use in your sodium-free shaker blend.
1. **Freshness “guarantee”**
* Keep in mind that “freshness” depends on how much you make, how you store it and how quickly you are able to use it.
* If you have an herb garden, making your own blends is a great way to ensure nothing goes to waste. (of course, you may want to get a food dehydrator to assist!)
* It also depends on the freshness of the ingredients you use. Here are a few tips:
* Whole spices about 4 years (*whole peppercorns, cinnamon sticks, cloves, cumin and cardamom hold on to their flavor for ages.*)
* Ground spices 2-3 years (*give it the shake and sniff test…shake the jar, let it settle and give a sniff. If there’s not much smell, it’s time to toss. If fragrant but not as much as you think it should be, just use more in recipes*)
* Leafy herbs 1-3 years (*If dried herbs have no color or very little smell when crumbled in palm of hand, it’s generally too old for practical use. If no color but still packs a fragrant punch, then use them freely.*)
1. **Can save money**
* Especially if you are growing your own herbs
* But it can also cost more money if you are left with ingredients that you just can’t use up.
* Very effective in saving money if you share the cost of ingredients and share the blends created.
* Makes great gifts for the cooks in your life!

Tips For Storing Herbs, Spices and Blends

1. **Away from heat** – just because we use them near the stove, doesn’t mean we should store them near it.
2. **Away from humidity** – again, away from the stove/oven, dishwasher and not in the refrigerator or freezer. Another important tip…***Never shake it from the bottle/jar directly into the item you are preparing***. The steam goes right into the container and shortens it’s shelf life.
3. **Out of brightly lit areas** – inside a cupboard or drawer is good. A spice shelf is not advised unless the containers are dark or covered with a label. Glass jars on a spice rack look nice but would shorten the shelf-life significantly.

So, if you’re going to make your own spice blends, consider the container carefully and store appropriately. You will also want to use containers that allow you to date and label your concoctions!

**Let’s talk about Salt and Sodium**

First of all, salt and sodium are not the same thing. Salt is a compound that is made up of sodium and chloride. Sodium is a mineral, just as iron, calcium and zinc are minerals.

Therefore, a person could be on a No Salt diet, but they cannot be on a No Sodium diet. It is impossible to eliminate all sodium from our diets. Water has sodium and many foods have sodium inherently in them. Salt is something we add, so we can in fact, eliminate it.

**What is the difference between table salt, sea salt and kosher salt?**

Chemically and nutritionally, there is little difference between kitchen salts. All are at least 97 1/2 percent sodium chloride. But there are differences in the origin and processing of these salts.

**Table salt** is mined from underground salt deposits. Table salt is more heavily processed to eliminate minerals and usually contains an additive to prevent clumping. Most table salt also has added iodine, an essential nutrient that's is important for thyroid function. It was added to table salt because it is not readily available from any food sources. Table salt possesses very fine crystals and a sharp taste.

**Sea salt** is harvested from evaporated seawater and receives little or no processing, leaving intact the minerals from the water it came from. These minerals flavor and color the salt slightly. However, because these salts are usually expensive, it is worth keeping in mind that they lose their unique flavor when cooked or dissolved. Sea salt is available in a variety of coarseness levels.

**Kosher salt** takes its name from its use in the koshering process. It contains no preservatives and can be derived from either seawater or underground sources. Aside from being a great salt to keep within arm's reach when you are cooking, it is particularly useful in preserving, because its large crystals draw moisture out of meats and other foods more effectively than other salts.

All three have the same basic nutritional value, despite the fact that sea salt is often marketed as a more natural and healthy alternative. The real differences are in their taste, texture and processing, not their chemical makeup.

Table salt's fine granules dissolve quickly, making it the preferred salt of bakers. Sea salt and kosher salt are the preferred salt for savvy cooks because they possess larger, irregular grains that add a delightful crunch and hint of briny flavor when sprinkled on food at the last minute. Plus, they are easier to “take a pinch” of.

**TIP For folks who are trying to reduce their sodium intake**: Try switching to sea or kosher salt. As mentioned earlier, they are all pretty equivalent in sodium, but you may find that their unique flavor causes you to use less.