

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Dec 29, 2011

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Holiday Flavors Remembered

So, what was the flavor in that wonderful dip? And what did she use on those roasted vegetables? How might I get the recipe from the restaurant for the sauce? Have you asked yourself a question like that in the last several weeks, at any of the various holiday pot-luck meals, church dinners or special evenings out? If you have, you're probably remembering the value of a little extra spice here or there. It could be one you use, but in a different way. Or maybe it's one you're not familiar with at all. The holidays are when people brush off the old traditional recipes with all of Grandmother's spices, and when they try some of the newest combinations of seasonings that she never dreamed of.

Nutmeg is one spice with many faces. America seems to use mostly as a sweet spice in baked goods. We often pair it with cinnamon, cloves and allspice. We use it in pies, cookies, sweet breads and of course eggnog. But in other traditions nutmeg is more likely to be used on the cabbage or spinach, or with cheese. It's one of the spices in many curry powders and Caribbean jerk seasonings. It's often paired with hot chili pepper or cool lemon.

If you had macaroni and cheese with a special savor to it, the cook might have used nutmeg in the cheese sauce. Nutmeg gives spinach dips and creamed spinach an elegance of flavor. It adds a whole new flavor to steamed cabbage, boiled potatoes or baked squash.

To get the most flavor with the least spice, buy a whole nutmeg and just grate off

a pinch or two each time you need it. You can buy a nutmeg grater, but any rasp or rough surface will do. The nut is fairly soft, not hard like an almond shell.

Another flavor that is showing up in unexpected places is rosemary. We tend to use this herb with meat: on pork or beef roasts, on poultry or fish. Its strong-flavored leaves have enough punch that just a few in or even on top of cooking meat add all the seasoning we need. It's strong enough to stand up to garlic in a great burst of flavor. But just as it is strong, it balances very well with some of the lighter, cooler flavors. Rosemary and lemon cakes, cookies and breads are common these days. Butter seasoned with rosemary is wonderful on baked potatoes or a good whole-grain bread.

One final seasoning that seems to show up in holiday meals and not enough throughout the rest of the year is savory. This herb is actually two. Summer Savory is more commonly available. It has a lighter flavor and aroma than Winter Savory. Use more summer or less winter savory if you need to substitute. It is wonderful in almost any bean dish, including lentils and peas. But it's great to sprinkle on cheese dishes, or roll a log of cheese spread in the dried leaves. Add some to your leftover-turkey soup to make it taste like a new recipe. Some savory in the dish with the water when you microwave cabbage will add flavor, and you'll notice less odor of cabbage. Use it on baked fish, and in tomato soup and sauces, even vegetable juice blends.

No matter which herb or spice you're using, remember that old, stale spices have little flavor. Spice companies recommend getting new spices every year. If you can't manage that, do consider getting fresh for at least the ones you use most often. Store spices and herbs in a dark cupboard, drawer or box. And keep them away from the heat and moisture over the stove. Light, heat and moisture are what will steal their

flavor and aroma the most rapidly. If you have a few that you only use once or twice a year, it might be worth finding a corner in the freezer to store them.

Here's a recipe using nutmeg with spinach. You can do the same thing with cabbage too. Who knows, maybe even the kids will eat their spinach this way!

Creamed Spinach

¾ cups low fat milk	2 (10 oz) boxes frozen chopped spinach, thawed
2 cloves garlic, minced	1 Tbsp margarine
1 ½ Tbsp flour	¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
¼ tsp ground nutmeg	salt and pepper to taste

Drain and squeeze spinach to remove most of the liquid. Save ¼ cup of spinach water, combine with milk and garlic in small bowl. Cover bowl and microwave until hot and steamy. Let stand for 10 minutes to soften the garlic. Melt margarine in heavy saucepan. Whisk in flour until smooth. Add hot milk mixture all at once, whisking or stirring with a fork until smooth. Stir in spinach. Cook until sauce thickens and spinach is hot, but not until spinach starts to darken. Stir in nutmeg, cheese and salt and pepper if desired. Serve hot. Serves 4.