

# SPICE CLUB: BLACK PEPPER



**Botanical Name:** Piper nigrum

**Description:** Black pepper, or peppercorns are the fruits of a flowering vine in the Piperaceae family. The green, wide-leafed vines grow long tendrils where cylindrical clusters of the berries ripen. The fruits are small, about 5 mm (0.20 in) in diameter, containing a thin skin, very little actual fruit, and a single large seed, which is usually dried and used as a spice and seasoning. Peppercorns and the ground pepper derived from them may be described simply as pepper, or more precisely as black pepper. The fruits are picked at varying degrees of ripeness depending on the strength and type of pepper desired and then processed accordingly.

**Origin:** The vine is native to the Malabar Coast of India but is grown in nearly every tropical region. Vietnam currently grows and exports around 35% of the world's supply in black pepper, followed by India, Brazil, China and Sri Lanka. Used in practically every single style of cuisine imaginable pepper is the most traded spice worldwide and makes up 20% of the world's total spice trade. In fact, the black pepper trade is worth billions of dollars annually!

In early historic times pepper became an important article of overland trade between India and Europe and often served as a medium of exchange; tributes were levied in pepper in ancient Greece and Rome. In the Middle Ages the Venetians and the Genoese became the main distributors in Europe, and their virtual monopoly of the trade helped instigate the search for an eastern sea route. The desire for black pepper was also a driving force for many explorers such as Columbus and Vasco de Gama who set out hoping to find a faster route to India to quickly acquire it for spice-hungry European markets.

For a long time, pepper was primarily utilized as a medicine. The spice was even used in preserving mummies (Ramses the Great's body had peppercorns stuffed in the nostrils to help keep the body clean) and thought by many to cure insomnia and toothaches. Ancient Romans and Greeks loved pepper. In fact, the ancient Roman cookbook, Apicius, written in 4 AD uses black pepper in 80% of its recipes.

**Varieties:** All peppercorns, green, white, and black, come from the same plant. When forming in the vine, pepper berries are green; they could turn into black or white after being processed. Green peppercorns are dried, unripe fruits that have been preserved through flash-freezing, curing, or brining in order to preserve their color and flavor. Black peppercorns are dried, unripe fruits that have been cooked. White peppercorns are only the seeds of the dried, ripe fruits. Pink peppercorns are a bit of a misnomer as they're technically not peppercorns at all! They come from a tree called the Peruvian pepper tree and are more closely related to cashews and other types of tree nuts as opposed to peppercorns. (Those with nut allergies should avoid pink peppercorns!)

**Nutrient Profile:** One tablespoon (6 grams) of ground black pepper contains moderate amounts of vitamin K (13% of the daily value or DV), iron (10% DV), and manganese (18% DV), with trace amounts of other essential nutrients, protein, and dietary fiber.

Pepper contains phytochemicals, including amides, piperidines, pyrrolidines, and trace amounts of safrole. Pepper has a limited usage in medicine as a carminative (to relieve flatulence) and as a stimulant of gastric secretions.

Piperine is under study for its potential to increase absorption of selenium, vitamin B12, beta-carotene, and curcumin, as well as other compounds.

**Preparations:** Pepper is the world's most traded spice and is one of the most common spices added to cuisines around the world. Its spiciness is due to the chemical compound piperine found in the fruit and seed of the peppercorn, which is a different kind of spicy from the capsaicin characteristic of chili peppers. It is ubiquitous in the Western world as a seasoning and is often paired with salt and available on dining tables in shakers or mills.

Pepper is an extremely valuable spice in Southeast Asian cooking. You can use black pepper for its piquancy in most dishes. Ground white peppercorns are less aromatic and can be sprinkled on eggs or added to stir-fried rice. Green peppercorns pair well with seafood and are used mostly for stir fried dishes.

Black pepper is used in Arabic cooking particularly in North Africa, where it's often combined with spices like ginger, saffron, coriander, and turmeric. Black pepper is particularly good with red meat and chicken.

**Facts:** Like many eastern spices, pepper was historically both a seasoning and a traditional medicine. Pepper appears in the Buddhist scripts as one of the few medicines a monk is allowed to carry. Long pepper, being stronger, was often the preferred medication. Black pepper was believed to cure several illnesses, such as constipation, insomnia, oral abscesses, sunburn, and toothaches, among others. Pepper is known to cause sneezing. Some sources say that piperine, irritates the nostrils, causing the sneezing.

Piperine is also under study for a variety of possible physiological effects, although the mechanisms of activity for piperine in the human body remain unknown.

# Burger Seasoning



## Ingredients

- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 ¼ tsp salt
- ½ tsp brown sugar
- 1 tbsp paprika
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp onion powder
- ¼ tsp ground cayenne pepper

## Directions

Gather all ingredients.

Combine black pepper, paprika, salt, brown sugar, garlic powder, and cayenne in an airtight container.

Seal and shake to combine. Store in a cool, dry place between uses.

Enjoy!

# Ancho Steak Rub Recipe

## Ingredients

- ¾ tsp ground black pepper
- 2 Tbsp ancho Chile powder
- 1 ½ tsp kosher salt
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- ¾ tsp light brown sugar
- ½ tsp ground coriander
- 1 large garlic clove, minced
- 1 tsp chopped fresh thyme
- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil



## Directions

In a small bowl, mix the ancho powder with the salt, cumin, brown sugar, coriander, pepper, garlic, and thyme. Stir in the olive oil to form a paste. Rub or brush steaks with the paste and let stand for at least 30 minutes or up to 24 hours. Grill the steaks over moderate heat so the garlic and spices don't burn.