Move Over, Pumpkin Spice—This Warming Blend Deserves a Spot in Your Sweet and Savory Cooking

Pumpkin spice isn’t the only fall blend worth getting excited about.

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In a Nutshell

Mixed spice is a blend of cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, cloves, coriander, mace, and other warming spices, used in both sweet and savory cooking. Stir the fragrant seasoning into cakes, puddings, fruit compotes, hot drinks, soups, and stews. Here's how I use it in my kitchen.

Pumpkin spice may be the defining flavor profile of autumn in the US, but in Britain, Nigeria, New Zealand, and South Africa, mixed spice has long filled kitchens with the warm scent of cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, cloves, coriander, and mace. More complex than pumpkin pie spice, mixed spice is warm and sweet with bright, earthy notes. It's often used in cakes, mince pies, hot cross buns, puddings, drinks, and even savory dishes like soups and stews.

I grew up in Warri, on Nigeria's southern coast, with mixed spice in our cupboards. Teaspoonfuls often made their way into the batter for our Nigerian pancakes and, as Christmas approached, into fruitcakes and chin chin. Its warm, sweet aroma was so familiar that I never stopped to consider what went into the blend.

That changed when I moved to Canada in 2020. I looked high and low for mixed spice, but couldn't find it, so I began making my own. Blending it myself made me appreciate just how much is packed into that familiar jar: the sweetness of cinnamon and nutmeg, the perfume of mace, the citrusy lift of coriander, and the deeper warmth of allspice and cloves. Here's what sets it apart from pumpkin pie spice, how to make your own, and some of my favorite ways to use it.

A Brief History of Mixed Spice

Mixed spice has a long history in both sweet and savory cooking, and no two blends are exactly alike. It has appeared in British cookbooks since at least the late 18th century, with some of its earliest documented uses in savory dishes.

In Scottish cook Mrs. Frazer's *The Practice of Cookery, Pastry, Confectionary, Pickling and Preserving*, first published in 1791, a recipe for "Mixed Spices for Seasonings" combines black pepper, Jamaica pepper (another name for allspice), nutmeg, and cloves. Blends like it were used to season soups, fish, meat, poultry, pies, and pasties. Related mixtures, sometimes made with salt, were also known as cook's pepper or kitchen pepper.

By the 19th century, mixed spice was also showing up in the sweets and holiday foods with which it is closely associated today. The 1863 *Everyone's Pudding Book* uses it in recipes for mincemeat, Christmas pudding, and spiced sugar for fritters, just as the book anticipates "the coming in of the Christmas fruits."

Mixed spice eventually became familiar beyond Britain, including places such as Nigeria, South Africa, and New Zealand. In Nigeria, which gained independence from Britain in 1960, the blend became especially associated with European-style baking. Today, mixed spice appears in Nigerian fruitcakes

and other baked goods, often alongside cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves—a use that helps explain why the blend was such a familiar presence in my own childhood kitchen.

What Goes Into Mixed Spice?

No single definitive recipe exists for mixed spice, which is part of what makes the blend so interesting. Most versions contain cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg, and cloves; coriander, ginger, and mace are also common. The proportions shift from blend to blend, so one jar may lean heavily on cinnamon and nutmeg while another gets more floral lift from mace or citrusy brightness from coriander.

Its variability is part of what separates mixed spice from the more cinnamon-forward pumpkin pie spice familiar to many American cooks. Mixed spice can be warmer, earthier, and more aromatic, with enough range to work just as comfortably in savory cooking as it does in cakes and puddings.

How to Make Mixed Spice

If mixed spice is readily available where you live, you can simply buy a jar at the supermarket. If it isn't, it takes only a few minutes to mix your own. Freshly ground spices deliver the brightest, most vivid flavor, but recently purchased ground spices work well, too. Rather than letting a large jar linger in the cupboard for months, I make relatively small batches so the ground spices stay aromatic.

For my version, combine the following in a container with a tight-fitting lid, then seal the container and shake well to combine:

- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon, preferably Ceylon
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ground mace
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon vanilla powder (optional)
- Pinch of salt

The formula is flexible. If you prefer a more cinnamon-forward blend, add a little more cinnamon; if you love the bright, citrusy quality of coriander, increase that instead. I like Ceylon cinnamon here for its delicate, floral, slightly citrusy flavor, which lets the other spices in the blend come through. Cassia cinnamon—the more common supermarket variety—is darker, hotter, and more assertive. If Ceylon cinnamon isn't available, though, use whichever cinnamon you normally cook and bake with.

My Favorite Ways to Use Mixed Spice

Mixed spice may be closely associated with fruitcakes and puddings, but I reach for it far beyond those classics. Here are some of my favorite ways to use it:

- **Bake with it.** For most cakes, cookies, biscuits, fruitcakes, hot cross buns, puddings, and fritters, start with about 1 teaspoon mixed spice per cup of flour, depending on how prominent you want the spice flavor to be. Whisk it into the dry ingredients so it disperses evenly through the batter or dough. In strongly flavored bakes, such as molasses cookies or fruitcake, you can usually use closer to 1 1/2 teaspoons per cup of flour.
- **Cook it with fruit.** For pear, stone fruit, or apple compote, start with about 1/4 teaspoon mixed spice per pound of fruit and add more to taste; 1/2 teaspoon will give you a more pronounced spice flavor. Stir it in with the sugar and other seasonings at the beginning of cooking so the spices have time to meld with the fruit.
- **Make mixed spice sugar.** Stir 1/2 to 1 teaspoon mixed spice into 1/4 cup granulated sugar, depending on how strongly spiced you want it. Use it much as you would cinnamon sugar: Toss churros or fritters in it while they're still warm, sprinkle it over baked goods before or after baking, use it as a filling for sweet rolls, or stir a spoonful into a cup of coffee, tea, or warm milk.
- **Add it to hot drinks.** For hot chocolate, coffee, lattes, or mulled wine, start with a small pinch—about 1/8 teaspoon per serving. Whisk it directly into hot chocolate or milk-based drinks as they heat. For coffee, stir it into the finished drink or add it to the grounds before brewing if you want the flavor to infuse more gently. For mulled wine, add about 1/2 teaspoon per 750 ml bottle along with the other aromatics and strain before serving.
- **Bring it back to savory cooking.** Start conservatively, with about 1/2 teaspoon mixed spice for a dish serving four, then taste and add more if needed. Add it alongside the other ground spices near the beginning of cooking so it has a chance to bloom in the fat and lose any raw, dusty edge. It works particularly well in marinades, soups, stews, curries, and braises, where a small amount can round out the other seasonings without making the dish taste overtly sweet or distinctly of baking spices. I also like to use it to season pumpkin, butternut squash, and honeynut squash, using 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon per pound of the vegetables.
- **Stir it into butter or cream.** For compound butter, start with about 1/2 teaspoon mixed spice per 4 tablespoons softened butter, along with a pinch of salt and sugar or honey if you want it sweet. For whipped cream, steep about 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon mixed spice in 1 cup cream over low heat, cool the cream completely, then strain and whip as usual. You can also simply whisk a small pinch into cold cream before whipping for a subtler effect.
- **Use it in place of another spice blend.** When a recipe calls for pumpkin pie spice or apple pie spice, mixed spice can usually be substituted 1:1 by volume. Because blends vary, taste the finished mixture when possible and adjust before adding more.

Today, I keep a small batch of homemade mixed spice in my kitchen, just as my family did when I was growing up in Nigeria. Once you try it in a few sweet and savory applications, you might decide the warming spice blend is a must-have in your cupboard too.