



Spice It Up!

World Map Activity



Purpose: To get students excited about herbs while bringing in geography. This activity shows that herbs come from across the globe.

Background: Herbs and spices have been used by people for centuries for culinary, medicinal, and even religious purposes. In general, **herbs** are considered culinary flavorings that come from the vegetative part of the plant, most often leaves and roots. Herbs such as parsley, bay leaves, oregano, summer savory, thyme, sage, basil, and marjoram are leaves. **Spices** are most often seeds, seed pods, and fruit (usually dried). Black pepper, chili pepper, nutmeg, sesame, mace, mustard, vanilla, cacao, kola, celery seed, turmeric, and almond are seeds, seed pods, or fruit. Of course, there are exceptions—ginger is from a root, cinnamon is from the bark of a tree, and saffron is the actual stamens of crocus flowers.

Herbs and spices come from plants. Plants produce chemicals that provide a wide array of scents and flavors. In nature, these chemicals can repel or discourage pests from eating them. They can also encourage pollinators and other useful animals to eat them and disperse the seeds while repelling other animals. For example, scientists have discovered that mammals can experience the heat of spicy hot peppers while birds cannot. Pepper seeds traveling through the digestive systems of mammals are damaged or even digested by some mammals. When the remnants are spread in the animal's waste, the seeds are no longer capable of germinating and producing new plants. However, pepper seeds digested by a bird pass through its system unharmed, are spread in the environment, and then germinate and produce new plants. So the bird is the preferred consumer of pepper fruits and mammals are not. The hot spice of the peppers dissuades mammals from consuming peppers, leaving them available for birds to eat.

Herbs and spices used in our foods represent rich cultures throughout the world. **Seasonings** help identify specific cuisine within various regions of the world. Italian seasonings from the Mediterranean are familiar to foods such as pizza, pasta, and breads. Cajun seasonings are familiar in the Southern United States, while Southwest seasonings are common in the hot, desert states of New Mexico and Arizona.

Many of our foods are produced both near and far, but herbs and spices could represent the richest geographic diversity of all our foods. These flavor-enhancing foods have been imported and exported across the world since the **Columbian Exchange**. Refer to [additional lessons](#) on the Matrix to cover the Columbian Exchange in more depth. (Information Courtesy of National Ag in the Classroom)

Materials: World Map poster, *1 copy of Spice It Up Herb Chart, tape

Activity:

1. Prior to class, choose three or more of the herbs and spices listed in the *Spice It Up Herb Chart. Prepare a small sample of each herb(s) and spice(s) and cover up the label.
2. Ask for a student volunteer to observe and smell each sample.
3. Ask the student to identify the food or foods that come to mind when they smell the seasoning. Seek responses from multiple students, noting that more than one food may be associated with each seasoning, and it may vary from person to person.
4. Hang a World Map poster and print 1 copy of the Spice It Up Herb Chart.
5. Cut the Spice It Up Herb Chart so that you can give each student one herb.
6. When students come into class, hand each student one herb ticket.
7. Have students tear the ticket on the dotted line and stick their herb/spice portion to the map where it originated (red font).
8. When done, take a step back and analyze.

*Additional materials can be found on FAITC's website under Teacher Resources, under Make N' Takes.

Follow Up Questions:

- Is there a concentration of herbs in one place?
- Why do you think herbs are scattered throughout the globe?
- Do your parents use herbs at home?
- In what type of food are you using herbs?
- Do you think that herbs bring people together? How so?

