

# Pumpkin Spice

by Carol Barany

I made a white-knuckle-drive back to Yakima last week after enjoying a few exhilarating days with my two amazing grandchildren in Olympia.

I cruised home along Highway 12. Bejeweled in spectacular autumn colors and a frosting of fresh snow at White Pass, a stunning Hunter's Moon was rising over my favorite road as I drove into Naches.

What was there to be stressed about?

I had a long list of buttoning-up-the-garden-for-the-winter chores waiting for me at home, and I was way behind. There was today's column to write, and no topic had come to mind yet. What's more, I had two days to do it all before leaving for a long visit with family in Buffalo.

When I got home, I found a Pumpkin Spice Latte on the counter, left by a dear neighbor who knew I could use a treat. Sipping it slowly, I was reminded that November is more than a time for getting the garden ready for winter.

For now, forget about the leaves piling up, the dahlias that need digging, and the irrigation lines you haven't blown out yet.

Instead, savor a Pumpkin Spice Latte with a friend, bake a pumpkin pie, or share a big batch of pumpkin cookies with your neighbors.

Your kitchen will smell like heaven, thanks to a botanical world that gifts us with the wondrous plants that go into Pumpkin Spice.

Pumpkin Spice describes a combination of cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg, and allspice. It does not include pumpkin!

While it may seem trendy, the mix dates back to colonial times. In cookbooks of that era, one pumpkin recipe used a combination of mace, nutmeg and ginger. Another included a mix of molasses, allspice and ginger.

In 1934, McCormick, the world's largest spice company, combined the five spices in a single jar and called it Pumpkin Pie Spice. At the same time, canned pumpkin became widely available. These new introductions transformed home baking.

Starbucks introduced the Pumpkin Spice Latte in 2003. Since then, more than 424 million have been brewed in the United States alone, making it Starbucks' most popular seasonal drink.

And then there's Pumpkin Spiced Pringles, Cheerios and Oreos; Pumpkin Spice scented candles and air fresheners, white pumpkin pie M & Ms, and Pumpkin Spice infused craft beer and Martha Stewart Gummies. Did we really need Nissan Pumpkin Spice Blend Cup-of-Noodles, or Pumpkin Spiced Spam?

While pumpkins are native to the Americas, the five spices that make up Pumpkin Spice are only found in the tropics. Each spice comes from different parts of different plants, each with their own flavor and history.

**CINNAMON** is the dried bark of a number of trees in the *Cinnamomum* genus. When sold ground, it is often a mix of different closely related species. It's essential in an array of international cuisines. Who doesn't love it?

**GINGER** (*Zingiber officinale*) is a tropical plant with a fleshy rhizome that has been used as a cooking ingredient and medicinal herb for millennia. Its native range is tropical Asia. Ginger is fairly easy to grow from rhizomes purchased in the produce section of the grocery store. Look for rhizomes that are plump and firm, ideally with buds or eyes that are already swelling and showing signs of new growth. In Yakima, ginger plants can be grown in large containers and overwintered indoors. Once the rhizomes have reached the desired size, a portion of them can be harvested, leaving the rest in the container to re-grow.

**NUTMEG** (*Myristica fragrans*) is a tropical tree that is native to a few islands in eastern Indonesia, but now grown in tropical regions around the world. Seeds are processed to remove their outer coat. The inner kernel is what we know as the spice nutmeg. Freshly harvested nutmeg seeds are dark brown with a bright red, web-like outer covering called an aril, which happens to be the source of the culinary spice mace.

**ALLSPICE** is the dried unripe berry of *Pimenta dioica*, an evergreen shrub, similar to the bay laurel in size and form. It's sometimes grown as a canopy tree to provide shade to coffee trees planted underneath. Native to the Greater Antilles, southern Mexico, and Central America, allspice is now cultivated in many warm parts of the world.

**CLOVES** are the aromatic flower buds of the evergreen *Syzygium aromaticum* tree, native to Indonesia.

While pumpkins are grown world-wide, the Pumpkin Spice craze is limited to the United States. Let's take a break from working in the garden and enjoy it while we can.