

Mustard

Species Name: *Sinapis alba*, white mustard

Brassica nigra, black mustard

Family: Brassicaceae (formerly Cruciferae), mustard and cabbage plants

Spicy part: seeds (leaves also used as salad)

Origin: Mediterranean countries

Cultivation: USA, Canada, Denmark, Germany Holland, France, Britain, China and Japan

In earliest history, mustard was a spice for the wealthy. One legend tells that local farmers came to a restaurant after having made a profit at the market and watched noblemen putting some small seeds on their meat before eating. Feeling wealthy, they order a plate each of the yellow seeds. Once they had a mouthful, their cheeks, gums and mouths burned badly. Their conclusion was that the wealthy could have that seasoning.



The sixth century BC Greek scientist, Pythagoras, declared mustard an excellent cure for scorpion bites. In Rome, Pliny the Elder, announced that the use of mustard for lazy women turned them into excellent housewives. Apicius another Roman citizen used mustard as a spice for boiled birds like the ostrich, crane and duck, fried doves, boiled boar, other game and in some fish dishes.

Mustard was used by Charlemagne in the ninth century and was cultivated on imperial estates and in monasteries located near Paris. Thus, Roman sauces traveled to France. In French Bourgogne, where Dijon is located, the area became the "mustard capital" of today's markets. From France mustard was taken to Germany and England in the twelfth century and on to Spain and Portugal. Vasco da Gama took a barrel of mustard on his voyage to India.



Brassica nigra, black mustard seeds



Sinapis alba, white mustard seeds

Denmark had an advanced culture and its noblemen used mustard on their foods. Vikings also came to know mustard when they overtook the Isle of Man in the year 1234. The island was said to be easily plundered and so Vikings decided to see for themselves. The Earl of Conway arrived before the Vikings, captured them and put them upside-down in a separate barrel of mustard. This may be the only example of being executed by mustard ever told.

Mustard and folklore go together. In Germany, a bride may sew mustard seeds into the hem of her gown to be the one in the family to "wear the pants." In Denmark and India, sprinkling mustard seeds around a home keeps it safe from evil spirits. In the Faeroe Islands, smearing the cheek with a "mustard plaster" made from the powder-cured toothaches.

Taste comes from crushing the seed. The powder is mixed with water to get the true mustard taste. "Two substances, from different types of cells, then come into contact: sinigrin and myrosin. The resultant "mustard oil" has the slightly sour, but pungent, taste of mustard. If making homemade mustard, make only enough for the one meal, as it tends to lose its flavor if kept several days. Honey or sugar may be added to take the bitterness away. To have a more commercial taste, use an acid like vinegar, wine vinegar or lemon juice.

The Lore Of Spices by J.O. Swahn