



# SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 1

MARCH 2023

[WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM](http://WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM)

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Welcome to Spice, the Variety of Life, the Newsletter of Gwen's Blends!

I am hoping to create a place where we can learn, teach, and share experiences with other like-minded folk. A place where we can share ideas, ask questions, and be inspired to explore the world of herbs, spices, and flavors. This newsletter is just the first step. Podcasts, videos, blogs, webinars, the options for online real time and on-demand access are numerous and I hope to explore some of them down the road, but for now, the journey begins here.

## Gwen

### In this issue

What are Spices? and The Spice Trade – a short overview of how spices became such a big part of our lives

The Exchange

What's new at Gwen's Blends – Where to come see us and what new blends have we come up with?



### What are spices?

Technically speaking, **Spices** are, according to the Oxford dictionary, “an aromatic or pungent vegetable substance used to flavor food”. But that definition could also fit what we call **Herbs**. What is the difference between an herb and a spice? Herbs are usually grown in more mild climates and the leaves are the part of the plant most likely to be used. Spices, on the other hand are grown in more tropical areas of the world and the portions of the plant used are usually not the leaves. (Bark, berries, flower buds, roots, or seeds)

The one outlier here is Salt. Salt does not meet either of the criteria above, but it is an integral part of good flavor. We will discuss salt further in our next issue where we discuss Cooking with Herbs and Spices.

### The Spice Trade

So, how did we get here? How did humans evolve such a hunger for flavor and variety? While we may never know for sure, but many experts believe that once fire had

been mastered, early hunter gatherers began to use various leaves or pieces of bark to protect their meat from the ashes of the fire. They may have noticed that certain plants made their meat taste different, some for better, others, not so much.

Watching the animals around them and what they ate must have also helped them choose what greens to try with much the same outcome, some wins, some losses. Over time they learned what was good and added to their diet in a positive way, and what was to be avoided. The first palates were born.

Let's fast forward a few centuries. Hunter gatherers had settled down and begun to build permanent living areas, towns, villages. These developed into cities and centers of life where people congregated and began to trade goods. Staying put meant less variety in your diet. If you didn't move around, you were limited to what was nearby and we all know how eating the same things everyday can get a bit monotonous. Intrepid explorers began to wander, first by land and ultimately by sea, to discover new worlds and they brought back with them new and different foods. In the end, the Spice Trade is the single most powerful force responsible for the world we know today. The search for spices and control of their profits inspired thousands of expeditions of exploration.

Columbus was looking for a short cut to India to improve the transport of spices. Fortunately, he found America and among the many things he brought back with him to Spain were "peppers". England, Portugal, Spain, and France colonized large portions of the globe to capitalize on controlling large portions of the trade. The Dutch East India Trading Company founded in 1601 still exists to this day, filling our larders with the aromas of delicacies from around the world.

Now, this is the super-fast, super short version. For those who are interested in a deeper dive, there is no shortage of articles online. It is quite a fascinating journey to take, and I encourage those of you who are intrigued by history to take the time to explore. It will be time well spent.

## The Exchange

So, while we are all waiting for me to figure out how to get a real time live forum up and running, we can go old school and share recipes here. This is also a place where we can share other recommendations. Did you see another vendor at a fair that you think we should all know about? Find a great cookbook? An amazing farmer's market or local independent grocer?

Send me your questions and ideas and I will post them here (no personal info will be shared).

I'll start with a recipe I just tried and loved:



### Pulled Beef

- I 4-5# Chuck roast
- I container beef stock
- 2T Worcestershire sauce
- I-2T Salt
- 2-3T Gwen's Italian Blend

I cut up the chuck into fist sized pieces, put everything in the crock pot and cook on low for about 6 hours until it pulls apart easily. Smells amazing while it is cooking and tastes even better.

## What's new at Gwen's Blends

I am excited to announce we will be at the Capital Art and Craft Festival, Spring 2023!!!!!!

Hope you can stop by.

For Tickets go to:

[www.capitalartandcraftfestivals.com/tickets](http://www.capitalartandcraftfestivals.com/tickets).

**Use promo code : gwensblends for \$2.00 off**



DC Expo Center, Chantilly VA  
Booth 543

Friday, March 24 – 10:00am-5:00pm  
Saturday, March 25 – 10:00am-5:00pm  
Sunday, March 26 – 10:00am-4:00pm

Also Coming up!



Savor Bowie Food & Wine festival

April 14-15



South Riding Mosaic Festival

April 28

### New Blends

Garlic Herb – Salt free but loaded with flavor  
\$5.00 for 2 oz

Suya – Traditional Nigerian Blend  
\$10.00 for 6 oz

Smoked Chicken – Tastes like it's been on the smoker  
all day  
\$5.00 for 2.75 oz

Southwestern Rub – A little bit of Mexico, Native  
American and Spanish  
\$5.00 for 2.5 oz

Berberé – Fiery hot Ethiopian Blend, not for the faint of  
heart  
\$9.00 for 4 oz

Know someone who would like to join us? Send  
their name and email to me and I'll add them to  
the list.

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me  
know and I'll remove you.

[ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com)



[Check out the website](http://www.gwensflavorblends.com)

[www.gwensflavorblends.com](http://www.gwensflavorblends.com), you never know  
when something new will show up in the store!

## Next Month

# Cooking with Herbs and Spices

Plus, a new feature:

## Spice of the month

The debut:

# Cinnamon – the oldest spice



# SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 2

APRIL 2023

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Welcome back to Spice, the Variety of Life, the Newsletter of Gwen's Blends!

This issue will focus on a little information on the uses of herbs and spices, what's the difference, fresh or dried and other important information to help you on your journey to exploring flavor.

It will also bring the inaugural "Spice of the Month", a brief introduction to a particular spice. This month's feature, Cinnamon.

I hope you enjoy the issue,

## Gwen

### In this issue

Cooking with herbs & Spices – Understanding the basics

Spice of the Month -Cinnamon

The Exchange

What's new at Gwen's Blends – Where to come see us and what to check out.



### How to Use Spices and Herbs

While taste is a very personal and individual choice, and almost anything goes, there are definitely some best practices that apply to the herbs and spices used to get the best flavor possible from them. Let's look at a few of them.

We mentioned Salt last month, and while technically neither a spice or herb, it does factor into how those ingredients blend with the foods you are cooking. We have all probably heard dozens of judges and mentors on cooking shows and competitions talk about food "missing a little salt". In fact, it is an ingredient in most of the blends that we have for sale. (We do have several salt-free blends for those who are trying to watch their intake, so don't stop reading, but you might want to jump down to the next paragraph!) Salt serves many purposes from acting as a preservative, to influencing texture, to enhancing flavors by contributing to the balance of sweet, salty, bitter, spicy and umami that you hear so much about. The preservative nature is actually what led to the development of barbecue (more on that in a future issue.)

Two of the most frequently asked questions when cooking with herbs and spices are:

1. Fresh or dried?
2. Whole or Ground?

I think most cooks would agree that fresh herbs are usually the first choice, especially in salads and lightly cooked preparations. In the absence of those however, dried herbs provide just as much flavor with smaller amounts. The drying process concentrates the oils and therefore you need less to accomplish the same effect. As a general rule you can figure on **¼ tsp dried, powdered herbs to 2-3 tsp of fresh (Increase to ¾-1 tsp if using a crumbled, leafy herb)**. Herbs are also more fragile than most spices, so they are better added towards the end of the cook,

Spices, on the other hand, are very rarely available or even desirable in their fresh form. Here the decision becomes whether to use whole or ground up. When preparing a soup or stew that will cook low and slow for hours, whole spices will have a chance to bloom and permeate the food. When preparing hot and fast, such as grilling or roasting, ground spices might be the better choice. Measurements stay the same here, 1T of peppercorns will give you the same flavor as 1T of ground pepper.

To toast or not to toast, that is probably the third most important question. Generally speaking, if you are going to grind your own spices, then toasting them first is going to give you the best flavor possible. The 2-3 minutes of heat warms the oils contained in the seeds or pods and you can actually smell them coming to life.

The last little bit of guidance to consider is how strong the flavors of the herbs and spices themselves are. Some flavors are more dominant, such as Pepper and rosemary, while others take a subtler place in spectrum, such as parsley and chervil.

The best way to learn how various flavors will blend together is to combine them with a little bit of butter or cream cheese, let them sit together for at least an hour and then taste. If you like it there, you will probably like it in your dish.

We've tried to put together blends that will help you begin to define your own culinary viewpoint, (sort of like those 30-minute quick meal recipes for weeknights that you see in magazines) but that isn't meant to be the

end of the journey, just the beginning. Take a chance, take the time, and take a bite of what a life of cooking from the heart has to offer.

## Spice of the Month

Cinnamon has been called the "World's Oldest Spice". Why? Because it goes back much further than recorded culinary history. Indigenous to the Sri Lanka it was one of the first spices to be transported to the western world. While it, is grown in many other places now, Sri Lankan cinnamon is still considered to be the finest in the world.

The Cinnamon tree is a relative of the Laurel family, which is well-known for Bay laurel, another highly aromatic spice. The bark of the Cinnamon tree is the focus of harvesting and can be used whole or ground to a fine powder.

Cinnamon belongs to the group of "dominant" spices with a very strong impact and is usually used in moderation for that reason. It brings a sweet and savory essence to cooking and is popular in both baking and slow cooked meats, soups and stews.

## The Exchange

So, Gwen's Blends participated in the Capital Arts and Crafts Fair Spring 2023. Thanks to those of you who attended, it was nice to meet you. For those of you looking for something I didn't have, please drop me an email! I would love to help you find whatever it was you were searching for.

In the last few months, I have been fortunate to meet several other crafters and artisans that I think you would enjoy checking out.

I've included their websites for you to check out below.

Layton Life Creations – [www.laytonlifecreations.com](http://www.laytonlifecreations.com)  
Some of the most exquisite paper flower work you'll ever see.

Franca Fine Art – [www.francafineart.com](http://www.francafineart.com) Incredible pen and ink drawings that will blow your mind!

Debb Cusick Glass Studio -FB:DebbCusickGlass  
Gorgeous stained glass!

Runway45 -

<https://www.etsy.com/shop/Runway45BohoChic>

Really cute and unique designs!

Chocolate Moonshine DC –

[www.ChocolateMoonshinedc.com](http://www.ChocolateMoonshinedc.com), the most delightfully smooth fudge you've ever tried!

## What's new at Gwen's Blends

### Coming up!



Savor Bowie Food & Wine festival

Bowie Town Center

April 15-16



South Riding Mosaic Festival

April 28

### New Blends

Hawaij – An all-purpose Yemini spice with a wide variety of uses.

\$6.00 for 1.5 oz

Avo's Portuguese Allspice – A traditional Portuguese blend.

\$6.00 for 1.5 oz.

### On Sale

Barbecue Season is fast approaching, Check our Barbecue blends for 15% off

Email [ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com) to place your order.

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I'll add them to the list.

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I'll remove you.

[ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com)



[Check out the website](http://www.gwensflavorblends.com)

[www.gwensflavorblends.com](http://www.gwensflavorblends.com). You never know when something new will show up in the store!

## Next Month

American Cuisine – What Defines it?

Spice of the month

Peppers



# SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 3

MAY 2023

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Where do you get the ideas for your blends? How do you come up with them? The simple answer to both is that I love to eat, and I don't like to eat the same things all of the time. That leads me to research different cuisines, different techniques, and different flavors.

The different things I learn lead not only to new blends, but also new knowledge, which brings with it more questions and an even larger appetite for answers. Reading about food, food history and food culture is as nourishing for my soul as eating food is for my body.

This issue is the beginning of some of what I have learned about why we eat what we eat. I hope it stimulates your appetite.

## Gwen

### In this issue

What is American Cuisine – What defines it?

Cajun Cuisine

Spice of the Month -Peppers

The Exchange

What's new at Gwen's Blends



### What IS American Cuisine?

That is a tougher question than it seems.

In the early 1900's a play by Israel Zangwill called "The Melting Pot" hit the Broadway stage. A story of the coming together of many cultures and the coming of age all rolled into one. The story is one of two young Russian immigrants, one a young Jewish man and the other a Christian woman (think new world Romeo and Juliet). After the trials and tribulations of trying to assimilate into the new culture of America, the young man declares:

"Understand that America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming!"\*

The play may not have been a Tony award winner, but it struck a chord, especially with President Theodore Roosevelt, and a catch phrase was born.

When so many cultures come together it is inevitable that they will share stories, histories and, of course, food. Not just in the densely populated cities, but also in the countryside as the pioneers moved ever further west. Each wave of immigrants brought with them new traditions and new cuisines were created based on the old world's recipes and the new world's animal and vegetable offerings.

When you think of American food, do you think of, jambalaya, smoked brisket, burgers and hot dogs or Tex-Mex? Maybe a combination of all of them? They are all a part of the American culinary experience. Perhaps the definition of American Food is simply put:

**“The Cuisines of the world brought together, melted and reformed in new and exciting ways to represent the diverse cultural backgrounds of all who call themselves American.”**

Let's take a look at some of the more notable, regional reformations in detail, starting with Cajun Cooking.

### Cajun Cuisine

In 1604, the first rural French settlers from the Vendee region of France (just south of the Loire Valley) began to settle in the Arcadia regions of what we now call Nova Scotia. As often happens, where people congregate, governments look to exert control. So, it was with the British in the mid 1700's. The French settlers, now called Acadians, fought the British control and as a result some 14000 of them were deported from Canada in 1755.

Most of the deported Acadians made their way to Louisiana, picking up bits and pieces of native American, German, Spanish, and Black Creole cultures. It is believed, that, along the way the French “Acadians” became “Cajuns” as a sort of slangy pronunciation that was easier for their new friends to pronounce.

Journeys lend themselves to a one-pot cooking routine and the Cajuns became adept and living off the land they travelled through. They also travelled light, without many possessions, which helped to add to the impression that Cajun food was peasant food.

That label sadly betrayed the depth and dimension of flavor that the Cajuns created with foraged vegetables and fresh meat. The Holy Trinity of Cajun food (onions, peppers, and celery) grew wild in the swamp., as did rice. Through it all together and you have Gumbo.

Given the history of the people, from the coast of France to the coast of Canada, to the wetlands and coast of Louisiana, it is no surprise that seafood plays a huge role in Cajun cuisine. Jambalaya is another staple of the region.

Boudin embodies all of the traits of Cajun cuisine: Spicy, meat and vegetables combined in one dish, and made with a variety of meats, just like the early settlers ate whatever they caught that day.

From very humble beginnings, with the influence of other cultures along the way, Cajun food embodies our definition of American food in the best of ways.

If that is peasant food, I'll eat my hat!

### Spice of the Month

Pepper. Such a simple word, but it describes an enormous part of the flavor spectrum. From the sweet orange and red bell peppers to the downright dangerous Carolina Reaper at 2.2 million SHU (more on that later). And let's not forget the ever-handly peppercorn from the common black to a virtual rainbow of other varieties.

For most culinary uses, the field narrows down to two main varieties, the Black peppercorn, and the Cayenne pepper.

The Black Pepper comes from a perennial, woody flowering vine in the Piperaceae family. Each fruit produces a single seed – the peppercorn. The plants are native to the Malabar coast of India.

The spiciness of peppercorns comes from a piperine, which is different from the capsaicin we are all familiar with in chili peppers. Usually used ground, it is the one of the most used spices in the world.

Cayenne Peppers, on the other hand grow on annual, upright bushes and come from the Solanaceae family (which also contains the deadly nightshade). There are



virtually dozens of varieties of cayenne alone, not to mention the other kinds of chili peppers such as jalapeno, habanero, etc.

Remember that SHU, I mentioned at the beginning of the article? Okay, it stands for Scoville Heat Units and is a rating system developed by a pharmacist named (you guessed it) William Scoville in 1912. It measures that amount of capsaicin in a pepper to determine its spiciness. For a reference point, Cayenne usually rates around 30,000-50,000 SHU. A jalapeno usually runs between 2000-8,000 SHU. So, the California reaper is about 55 times hotter than the hottest Cayenne and about 350 times hotter than the average jalapeno.

The Cayenne is native to Central and South America, where it has been cultivated for over 900 years. Columbus brought seeds back to Europe after his voyage of 1492. The rest is, as they say, history.

#### Fun fact:

Many men from Louisiana went to Mexico to fight the Mexican war between 1846-1848. Some came back with pepper seeds. One man brought some special seeds to a local family named McIlhenny on Avery Island – the peppers we now know as tabasco and the sauce sells millions of bottles a week.

### The Exchange

First of all, I would like to welcome all of the new friends who have joined our community from Bowie and South Riding. I enjoyed meeting all of you and look forward to hearing from you as you explore the different blends you purchased to try.

One young lady I met in Bowie shared a recipe for the Berbere seasoning. It is called Awasay mix and is a simple mixture of berbere, wine (or any other alcohol) lemon juice, water, and a dash of oil. The consistency should be thin enough to dip a piece of bread in, but thick enough to stick to the bread. You can alter the amounts of the liquids to taste as long as the consistency stays like nice thick salsa.

Awasay mix is used for bread, vegetables, or even uncooked meat, as the alcohol kills the bacteria. You can experiment with different types of alcohol to create

different flavor profiles. Red wine is the most common choice.

### What's new at Gwen's Blends



Saturday and Sunday 10am – 5pm

#### New Blends

Bzar - A fragrant blend of spices used widely throughout the UAE, much as garam masala is throughout India. The familiarity of the warm spices such as ginger, cardamom and nutmeg are balanced with coriander, pepper, and cumin to create a blend used daily in most households. Sprinkled in soups and stews or added to ghee for basting or tasting, this blend enhances anything you cook with it. (1.5 oz.)

\$6.00

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I'll add them to the list.

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I'll remove you.

[ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com)



[Check out the website  
www.gwensflavorblends.com, you never know  
when something new will show up in the store!](http://www.gwensflavorblends.com)

## Next Month

American Cuisine – Barbecue,  
how American is it really?

Spice of the month

Cumin



# SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 4

JUNE 2023

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Happy Summer Solstice!

Summer is just around the corner and with it comes the bounty of harvest. Gardens are hitting their stride and fresh produce is all around you. Tomatoes, cucumbers, and a wide variety of herbs, just to mention a few, are ripening even as you read this newsletter.

But there is another side of summer bounty. One that goes hand in hand with fresh garden vegetables - Barbecue! Yes, summer is the time that the air fills with the mouthwatering smell of meat cooking over an open fire or the smokey goodness of smokers being lit all around the neighborhood.

Where did this delicious tradition begin? How did we come to such a widely varied offering? What is the difference between all of the varied types of barbecue?

Keep reading to find the answers. This issue is dedicated to the unashamed carnivores among us. (Although there is a bonus for the veggie lovers under the "What's new" section.)

## Gwen

### In this issue

Barbecue – What is it, where it came from

Spice of the Month -Cumin

The Exchange

What's new at Gwen's Blends



### American Barbecue

From throwing a shrimp on the barbie to Japanese hibachi cooking to roasting a whole hog on an open pit, cooking meat over fire is a global experience that began millennia ago when humans first learned to control fire. As with many other types of cooking and cuisine, Americans have embraced barbecue and integrated it into their culture.

The difference here is that barbecue is presented as a thoroughly "American" thing to do. Beginning with the post WWII creation of suburbia, where everyone had a yard to cook in, the image of a family sitting at a cedar picnic table with red and white checkered tablecloth has become synonymous with wholesome American family fun.

That storyline is not an entirely accurate representation of the act of cooking meat over a fire with dry or wet rubs. The truth begins back in the late 1490's when, after Columbus returned to Spain, many Spanish explorers set out to explore and conquer the new world.

Starting with Cortes in Hispaniola around 1504, the explorers moved to the Yucatan peninsula and then north and south along the Atlantic coast.

The natives the first landing parties encountered prepared a food the Spaniards dubbed “Barbacoa”. The technique involved smoking meat for preservation. Various berries, roots and barks were added to help keep the insects away. This smoked meat was perfect for an explorer’s lifestyle. Hunting could be done for the whole journey and the meat smoked so that when the group was ready to move on, food was not a concern. When they stopped, a portion of the meat was covered in lime juice and peppers to re-hydrate and flavor the meat before the final cook.

The Europeans took the technique back home with them, and while they could take many of the spices with them, the citrus did not make the journey and so vinegar based sauces were invented. The acidity of the vinegar was a good substitute for the lime juice.

As the Spaniards moved north and other settlers from the early east coast settlements moved south, the agricultural lifestyle of the south increased in importance in feeding the growing population of the new world. Slavery was the solution for the labor that feeding a growing country required. The individuals forced into this lifestyle did their best to maintain the cultural identity they knew and brought their cuisine with them. The first major integration of cuisines since the original settlers learned from the natives in Massachusetts and Virginia began. To continue with an analogy we used last week, the melting pot got way bigger. In this instance, the west African cooking technique of “Babbake” merged with the west Indian “Barbacoa” and “Barbecue” was the result.

Pork was an integral part of the diet in the southern territories. It was plentiful, cheap, and filling. It also lent itself well to the barbecue technique. It was the mainstay of southern barbecue for many years. As settlers moved west and cattle became raised in quantity, Kansas City developed into a transportation hub for the beef cattle raised on the range to get to the east coast, so the Kansas City style is more beef centric. Texas, ever the free-spirited, free-thinking territory went even further by focusing on beef and eliminating a majority of the spices and sauces, focusing on letting the flavor of the beef speak for itself.

Barbecue was still considered a primarily southern food style until the cold war years. No one really knows how or why barbecue became such an “American” thing to do, perhaps because it was the space that a suburban communities offered, or maybe soldiers returning from the far corners of the world brought back an appetite for new flavors, but the backyard barbecue soon became a mainstay of suburban life. It was almost a patriotic duty.

Women enthusiastically embraced it since it got them out of the kitchen on hot summer days. (Remember, there wasn’t a lot of air conditioning back then). Men enjoyed it and it became a sort of bonding ritual, taking them back to their hunter/gatherer roots. Regardless of why, we all reap the benefits of barbecue wherever we live.

That being said, there are several distinct regional types of barbecue that have evolved due to the climate, immigrant influx, geographic locations. Most notably, we have: Memphis, Kansas City, North Carolina-East & West, Texas, and Georgia. Each has its own character and flavor profile. While these 6 regions get the most press, there are many other regions that have developed their own take on barbecue. Hawaii, Alabama, Chicago, and South Carolina bring their own twist to the genre.

A more detailed listing of the major and minor barbecue centers will be included in The Exchange below.

How ever you cook it, whatever you rub it with, food prepared over an open fire will always draw a crowd and for good reason – it simply tastes better!

### Spice of the Month



Cumin is a member of the parsley family native to the Central Asian/Eastern Mediterranean region. The seeds have been found in archaeological sites from as far back as the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. It is interesting to note that

cumin seeds are still harvested by hand. If you have ever seen the whole seeds, you can appreciate the work it takes to gather large quantities.

Cumin is used in both the seed form and the ground form in cultures from India and the European Mediterranean to the Latin American cultures colonized by the Spanish and Portuguese. Seeds should be toasted and must be added early in a recipe to give time for oils to integrate, but ground cumin can be added later in the cook.

Cumin is used widely in curries, chili powders and in many north African blends such as Baharat. Its warm flavor with a touch of bitterness blends well with many other spices. The sweet earthy tones are why it feel so familiar in such a wide variety of cuisines and applications.

Cumin has been found to have a positive effect on cholesterol levels, lower blood sugar and stress relief. They are also a good source of iron.

## The Exchange

A little more detail from our feature article for those who are interested.

### Types of Barbecue

Memphis – Traditional

Meats-pork shoulder, butt & ribs, pulled pork

Sauces- Molasses based

West Tennessee

Meat - whole hog

Sauces - acidic sauces, always served with coleslaw

Kansas City

Meat – Heavy on the beef

Sauces -Thick sauces loaded with brown sugar, molasses & tomato

N. Carolina- west – Bavarian Heritage & influence

Meat – Pork shoulder

Sauces - Ketchup based, based on a pork dish with a vinegar sweet & sour sauce thought to be the precursor of ketchup

N. Carolina - east – Wood coals 12+ hours

Meat -whole hog

Sauces - peppery vinegar sauce

Central Texas – Low & slow, NO frills

Meat -Beef

Sauces – None, just salt & pepper

East Texas – Hearty, cheap meals designed to fill the bellies of hard-working, newly freed slaves that flooded the region.

Meat - Beef & pork cooked over hickory served with LOTS of sides

Sauces – Tomato based, tomato based sauces

South Texas – Really the only region that has original barbacoa left. Cooked in underground pits.

Meats -Uses cheap often ignored cuts, head to tail, cow head, tongue, goat

Georgia – Overnight smoking

Meats -pulled pork but also smoked sausage, brisket, chicken

So. Car – German Influence

Meats – Whole hog

Sauces – Mustard

Hawaii- Philippine influence

Alabama- white sauce with mayo

Kentucky – mutton smoked over hickory

Chicago – ribs

California – tri tip over oak with S&P and garlic

## What's new at Gwen's Blends

Coming up!

July 9

Silver Spring Arts & Crafts Summer Fair

Veterans Plaza, Silver Spring, MD

1-7 PM

July 29

Bites, Beats & Brews in Old Town Alexandria

John Carlyle Square, Alexandria, VA

11 am – 6 pm

## New Blends

### ← Attention: Veggie Lovers →

Summer Herb Blend 1.5 oz. \$6.00

A light blend of:

Basil, Parsley, Thyme, Dill, Mint, Lemon zest, Garlic,  
and Pepper

Perfect for a vinaigrette over a fresh summer salad.

Not available online – come see us at one of our events  
this summer or reach out to us via email.

## On Sale

Barbecue Season is fast approaching, Check out our  
Barbecue blends for 20% off. Regular price \$  
10.00each.

**This month \$8.00 each.**

Café Mocha- 6.5 oz.

Coffee, Sugar, Cocoa, Paprika, Cinnamon, Cayenne, Salt

Carolina – 5.5 oz.

Paprika, Salt, Sugar, Cumin, Chili Power (Paprika,  
Garlic, Cumin, Cayenne, Oregano), Pepper

Gwen's Barbecue Rub – 6.5 oz

Sugar, Paprika, Salt, Cumin, Garlic, Chili Powder  
(Paprika, Garlic, Cumin, Cayenne, Oregano)

Email [ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com) to place your order.

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when something new will show up in the store!

## Next Month

American Cuisine Part 3—  
Blackened, Creole, Southwestern  
Spice of the month

Chili Powder



# SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 5

JULY 2023

[WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM](http://WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM)

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Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July

Welcome to issue 5 of *Spice, The Variety of Life*. With this issue we will conclude our journey into the melting pot of American cuisine with a look at Creole, Blackened and Southwestern cuisine. Each of them has a very strong place in any culinary history tour. Each with a rich history, a rich story, and a deep, rich flavor. That is not to say that we have covered all of the wonderful flavors to be found in America, just that there is so much more waiting for us to discover around the rest of the world.

From here we will venture over the pond to the Mediterranean and its diverse cultures. The Mediterranean regions are, to many, the very heart and soul of the world of herbs and spices.

As we approach the 6-month anniversary of this newsletter, I invite you to send your questions, ideas, and suggestions for future topics to be featured. I am going to throw out some ideas I have, in The Exchange. Please take a moment to let me know if any of them capture your interest, or if there is something I haven't considered.

I hope to hear from you and, as always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Enjoy!

*Gwen*

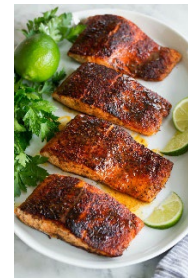
## In this issue

American Cuisine Part 2 – Blackened, Creole, Southwestern

Spice of the Month -Chili Powder

The Exchange

What's new at Gwen's Blends



## What is Blackened Food?

Most of the time food that is black is simply something left on the grill until it is inedible. That could not be further from the truth with Blackened food.

In the early 1980's a young, relatively unknown chef named Paul Prudhomme was trying to make his mark in the very competitive kitchen world of New Orleans. His idea, to find a way to create food with an open grill flavor and aesthetic from the confines of a traditional kitchen. The result set the culinary world on fire (no pun intended).

Chef Prudhomme dredged his protein in spices (traditionally garlic, onion, chili powder, and herbs) and then placed them in a screaming hot iron skillet with butter. The spice coating and butter would char quickly, creating that brown layer that seals in the flavor and moisture. The spices then toasted as the meat or fish cooked, (2-3 minutes per side) giving you a depth of flavor not found in too many other techniques.

Only firmer meats and fish can withstand the aggressive treatment and are usually kept to a maximum of 2" thick or they will not cook through. (Note: if trying this at home, make sure that you have plenty of ventilation, because this WILL smoke)

I think it is safe to say that Chef Prudhomme achieved his goal of making his mark, not only in New Orleans, but perhaps the entire world. For his ambition and creativity, Chef Paul Prudhomme certainly has earned his place as one of the most influential chefs of our time.

### Creole – Isn't it the same as Cajun?

The short answer to that question is NO.

It is easy to understand the confusion, both originated in New Orleans, both share many of the same ingredients and both have a reputation for being rather spicy. However, there are many more differences between them than similarities.

As you may remember from May's Issue 3, Cajun food comes from the Arcadians, a group of settlers from France that initially moved from France to Canada and then migrated south from Canada to escape British tyranny. Their style was very "live off the land."

The Creoles, by comparison were second and third generation French and Spanish people who lived in New Orleans before America took control of the city in 1803. They were city folk and for the most part, on the wealthier side. They inhabited what was known, even then, as the "French Quarter" while the newly arriving white settlers tended to stay in the central Business District.

Creole food is a bit more refined than Cajun, using roux made with spicy butter, tomatoes, and plenty of protein, whereas Cajun cooking uses lard, no tomatoes (they

don't grow wild), and more filling starches and less protein. There is an old saying:

*"Creole cooking feeds one family with three chickens and Cajun cooking feeds three families with one chicken."*

Even the spices show the class differences. Cajun food uses lots of peppers, which grew plentifully and were cheap, while Creole food uses more tender herbs that need careful cultivation and extravagant spices brought over from Europe.

In short, Creole food is city food, while Cajun food is country food. Both delicious and both worth eating.

### Southwestern – The most "American" food?

Southwestern cuisine, normally associated with the region of America that covers New Mexico, Arizona, Texas and the lower parts of Colorado and Utah, has its roots in Mexican, Spanish, and native American cuisine. Influences from the Hopi and Zuni tribes form the basis of Southwestern style cooking, which makes it the most prominent form of cuisine based on native American traditions and culture.

Much as New Orleans has its "Holy Trinity" of onion, bell peppers and celery, Southwestern cooking has its "Three Sisters" of blue corn, beans, and squash. The local plant life provided most of the diet of early inhabitants. Pine nuts ground to make cakes, acorns to thicken stews, cactus fruit for jelly and the distinct and nutty flavored blue corn were augmented by meat obtained from hunting. In the spirit of respecting what the land gave them, what we now call "nose to tail" was the order of the day. Nothing was wasted. Large pots simmered for hours to create thick, flavorful, stick to your rib's food. Everything went into the pot, meat, beans corn, everything. These stews were the predecessor of what we call chili today.

*Urban Legend – It is rumored that the first bowl of "Chili" was served at a spot called The Juniper House, in 1863 in a town called Prescott, Arizona.*

As the Spanish and Mexicans began to move north, they brought with them, onions, avocados, and chocolates as well as more varieties of peppers. Merging all of the wonderful ingredients brought us to what many now call



“new” Southwest cuisine, when in fact we are simply returning to our roots. Clean, fresh, spicy food served with corn tortillas, beans and fresh herbs is the true Southwestern way.

### Spice of the Month



Chili Powder is a term used for a wide variety of spice blends. Some versions are totally made up of the dried ground versions of chili peppers, and others start with a base of the chili pepper, but then add complementary spices for a robust blend used to enhance many dishes.

It is this balance of flavors that lead many chefs to turn to chili powder instead of just using cayenne. If heat is the main goal, then ground cayenne (or habanero, ghost, or scotch bonnet) is what you are looking for. If, however, you are looking for depth of flavor WITH heat, then chili powder is what you want.

The beauty of a well-balanced chili powder is that it brings more to the table. Oregano, garlic, onion, cumin, paprika and salt are the most common ingredients added to the chili peppers. While many of these ingredients seem to lean towards the tex-mex, & southwestern styles of cooking, a little chili powder can liven up any barbecue rub or even a potato salad. Anything that can stand a little kick without overpowering heat is a good candidate for this versatile blend.

### The Exchange

So, as promised in the intro, I wanted to share some thoughts on where this newsletter can go and what it can be. When I started, I envisioned a world tour of cuisines and spices, that would encourage people to try new things, but I didn't take it much further than that at the time.

My original itinerary included stops in the Mediterranean, Africa, Europe, India, and circling back towards home with a stop in Latin America. That gives us about 5 more issues.

What next? There are so many things we can explore together. Other topics we could touch on, include the health benefits of various spices (not in a diagnostic, medical way, but more holistic & folkloric), and garden and cultivation tips.

Maybe more history. There is some much more to explore in the past. If you really think about it, food has pretty much shaped all of history. Leaving the nomadic lifestyle behind allowed agriculture to literally take root and stationary camps led to cities and so on.

How did the nectarine get here? What's the deal behind creating new strains of fruits, vegetables and even animals? How does science factor into food?

What about an issue filled with everyone's favorite food memory? Or stories about conquering food fears. Ideas for getting the best of food allergies?

These are just a few ideas that we could explore. To coin a foodie phrase "the world is our oyster". I am not advocating for any of the ideas above in particular, just trying to start a conversation and wondering if anyone has anything they really want to learn about. I love to learn anything about food and people.

Let me know!

### What's new at Gwen's Blends

Coming up!

July 9

Silver Spring Arts & Crafts Summer Fair  
Veterans Plaza, Silver Spring, MD  
1-7 PM

July 29

Bites, Beats & Brews in Old Town Alexandria  
John Carlyle Square, Alexandria, VA  
11 am – 6 pm

August 12

International Food & Craft Festival  
Veterans Plaza, Silver Spring, MD  
1-7 PM

August 26

Around the World Cultural Food Festival  
Orinoco Bay Park, Alexandria, VA  
11 am – 7 pm

### New Blends

Nate's Nashville Hot – A smokin' hot version of the classic rub based on the original from Prince's Hot Chicken Shack

3.75 oz for \$6.00

### On Sale

Everything Seasoning was \$10.00, now \$5.00.

Adobo Seasoning was \$10.00, now \$7.50.

Taco Seasoning was \$6.00, now \$5.00.

Email [ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com) to place your order.

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I'll add them to the list.

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I'll remove you.

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when something new will show up in the store!](http://www.gwensflavorblends.com)

## Next Month

## Mediterranean Cuisine

Spice of the month

Garlic



# SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 6

AUGUST 2023

[WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLEND.COM](http://WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLEND.COM)

[GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM](mailto:GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM)

Welcome to issue 6 of *Spice, The Variety of Life*. This issue will take us across the Atlantic to the Mediterranean and its diverse cultures. From the lush Greek Isles to the arid deserts of Morocco, the Mediterranean regions are, in many ways, the very heart and soul of the world of herbs and spices.

Despite all of the diversity of cultures and climates across the region, one principle stands above all else:

*Food is not just for nourishment. Dining is a time to gather, be social and enjoy your food. Mediterraneans take more time eating than any other culture in the world.*

As far as I am concerned, you can't go wrong with that as a guiding principle. So, let's take a look at the kind of food worth spending that time enjoying.

I hope to hear from you and, as always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Enjoy!

## Gwen

### In this issue

Mediterranean Cuisine

Spice of the Month -Garlic

The Exchange

What's new at Gwen's Blends

### A Mediterranean Vacation

We are going to shift our culinary journey from North America, one of the newest cultures in the world, to a place where the earliest recorded civilizations began. Egypt and Mesopotamia (the areas we now call Syria and Northern Iraq) were the birthplace of the civilized world. The rest of the world grew from their explorations.

The Mediterranean region, covering approximately 3-4% of earth's land mass, is about as diverse a region for its size as you will find anywhere else on the globe. From lows of 40-45° F to highs of 95°F or more in the desert the differences in the three regions can be quite impressive.

When I say "Mediterranean", what do you think of? Greece, Italy, Spain, Corfu? What about Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Israel? The Mediterranean Sea actually borders three continents, and while the close proximity of the sea provides similarities, climate, religion, and culture have an influence on each nation's individual culinary character.

There are three regions to consider. The Eastern Mediterranean region consists of Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Egypt. The Southern Europe region consists of Italy, the south of France and Spain. And finally, the North African region, made up of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. Let's look at the similarities between the regions first.

The hierarchy of foods is pretty consistent across the regions. Grain is the most important, followed by vegetables and legumes, spices and condiments, and finally

meat. The types of grains, vegetables, etc. will vary, but the proportions remain fairly consistent.

Fish and shellfish play a big role in most Mediterranean cuisines. The dry climate over most of the region does not lend itself to lush pasture lands, meaning fewer beef cattle and more goats and sheep (who exist more on grain than grass.) Lamb, goat, mutton are the primary red meat proteins. They tend to be tougher and more strongly flavored cuts than beef, therefore marinating and longer cook times factor highly in most recipes. You also will find much less dairy in Mediterranean cuisine, except for the Eastern regions where yogurt and cheese play an important role.

Fruits and vegetables are plentiful and are often served just the way they are, with little or no preparation, in savory cooking as well as desserts. And last, but certainly not least, the amazing olive trees that thrive across the region provide not only the sweet, succulent fruit that we all have come to love, but also the finest of olives oils for dipping and marinating. Olives or their oil find their way into a majority of meals served.

Flavorings are one of the first differences between the three regions. Herbs, fresh and dried, are more prevalent in the Southern Europe regions (Italy, France, Greece) while the northern and eastern regions are where you will find more of the seed spices, nutmeg, allspice, cumin, coriander etc.

I think what sets the eastern and northern regions apart from so much of the rest of the world, is their seemingly effortless weaving of spice that we, in Europe and North America, consider to be “sweet” spices into their food. Cinnamon, allspice, and ginger are more likely to be found in desserts here, but they play a substantial role in the savory offerings of these regions.

Preparations vary as well. The southern Europeans cook with wine, and they roast and bake their proteins. Religious principles prevent most eastern and north African cultures from using alcohol. The eastern regions lean heavily on open fire cooking either on a grill or a spit (like gyro). North African cooking is a wonderful mix of stews, soups, and tagines cooked low and slow over coals.

No matter which region whets your appetite, it is easy to see why lingering over your food is so important. With the variety of flavors and spices, the careful attention to balanced flavors and the care taken to extract the best of each and every ingredient, it is easy to see why

Mediterranean cuisine is worth taking more time to eat than any other culture.

It is also worth your time to explore cooking! A further look at the specifics of each region will be found later in the newsletter along with a list of blends available to try out.

## Spice of the Month



Garlic is one of the most recognizable spices. Native to south and central Asia, it has been carried far and wide and with careful cultivation can be grown as far north as Alaska. It is a member of the Allium family, which contains other familiar ingredients such as chives and the whole variety of onions.

With the exception of chives and spring onions, it is mostly the bulb that is consumed. The characteristic burst of odor from the alliums is created when the cells are damaged by cutting or smashing and allicin, a sulfur compound is released. The sulfur compounds evolved to help the bulb survive while underground, protecting it from predators and bacteria.

Garlic has gained a reputation as one of the more healthful spices with benefits that include lowering cholesterol, lowering blood pressure, and immune systems boosts among other things. It is those immune boosting properties that led to garlic becoming the primary protection against vampires. In medieval times, it was thought that the thirst for blood in vampires was caused by a blood disease and the garlic was used to ward off the germs from infecting others.

It has also been known to be very effective, if consumed in large enough quantities, to repel mosquitos. However, if the mosquitos can smell it, so can your friends and family, so you might want to try this with caution. 😊

## The Exchange

Is your mouth watering yet? Mine is.

I am going to include a very basic recipe that I use with a lot of the Mediterranean spices. It's actually one of my R&D recipes that I use to test out a new recipe. Chicken is a wonderful palette for trying new flavors since its mild nature does not fight with other flavors, but rather acts as more of a platform to let them shine. You can use almost any spice with this. I rotate through my blends, using a different one each time I cook, so chicken is never boring in my house.

### Basic Mediterranean Chicken Recipe

8 Boneless, skinless chicken thighs (or 4 breasts)  
1 tsp Salt  
½ c Lemon Juice  
¼ c Olive oil  
2T Shawarma, Baharat, Ras el Hanout or Lebanese 7 spice

*\*Note: When olive oil is referred to, I am speaking of Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO) certified by the International Olive Council.*

Cut chicken into bite sized pieces and place into zip lock bag with remaining ingredients and let marinate for minimum of 3 hours. (You can leave overnight.)

Place on sheet pan and cook at 450° for 17-20 minutes. (You can also place in air fryer on air roast for 15-18 minutes.)

*\*Note – Got a tip from a friend who prepares large amounts of food at a time and freezes. You can also freeze the meat while it is in the marinade. So, if there's a sale, you can cut up the chicken in batches, add the other ingredients, seal the bag, and put it in the freezer. Living singly, this allows me to buy the larger value packs, prepare with two or three different blends and be ready for a couple of weeks of good eating. I just take the chicken out of the freezer the night before, leave it in the refrigerator until I am ready to cook.*

## What's new at Gwen's Blends

Coming up!

August 12

International Food & Craft Festival  
Veterans Plaza, Silver Spring, MD  
1-7 PM

August 26

Around the World Cultural Food Festival  
Orinoco Bay Park, Alexandria, VA  
11 am – 7 pm

September 9-10

Burke Centre Festival  
Burke Centre Park  
Saturday – 9:30AM-5:00 PM  
Sunday – 10:00 AM-5:00 PM

September 23-24

Fall Riverfest, Occoquan  
Market Street, Occoquan, VA  
10:00 AM-5:00 PM both days

### Mediterranean Blends to try

Greek Seasoning - In keeping with the European tradition of cooking with herbs, this blend is primarily herbal blend with the addition of garlic and onion to add an earthy quality. The dash of cinnamon and nutmeg brings out the other flavors. It has the very Mediterranean vibe of bright and fresh, and goes well with seafood, poultry, and vegetables.

Italian Blend - An herbal blend from the southern region of Italy with the bite of garlic and pepper. It mirrors many of the Mediterranean flavors of a Greek seasoning, but with a stronger profile. Each of the ingredients of this mixture has a unique and identifiable flavor but, somehow, they all come together to create a harmonious blend that is unmistakably Italian.

Shawarma - Shawarma is traditionally known as a middle eastern dish of thinly sliced meat slow roasted on a spit but is also known as the blend of spices used to flavor the dish. This blend follows the path of many middle eastern warm flavors but veers off with the addition of garlic and chili powder. Great on roasted meats and veggies.

Lebanese 7 spice - Lebanese 7 Spice is a regional variation of Baharat. (Frequently called sabaa'Baharat). The ingredients are similar, but this variety has more emphasis on the pepper and less on the paprika. Good in soups and stews and for braising meats.

Ras el Hanout - This Moroccan spice literally translates to “Head of Shop”. Conversationally, it means “Top Shelf” for the assortment of rich spices used to create the blend. This blend is more of a floral, sweet profile, than spicy and savory. It complements lamb, game meats, rice and couscous and other foods prepared in tagines.

You can order on the site or drop me an email to place your order. [ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com)

## Next Month

### African Cuisine

### Spice of the month

### Cloves

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I'll add them to the list.

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I'll remove you.

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### Deeper dive in the Mediterranean Regions

Region	Eastern Region	Southern Europe	North African
Countries	Greece Turkey Syria Lebanon Israel Palestine Egypt	Italy Southern France Spain	Morocco Algeria Tunisia Libya
Proteins	Lamb Mutton Goat Poultry Seafood	Pork Chicken Lamb Seafood	Lamb Mutton Goat Seafood
Flavorings	Sumac Parsley Basil Mint Lemon Juice	Wine Garlic Capers Anchovies Mustard	Cumin Coriander Saffron Cinnamon Cloves Paprika
Grains	Rice Flat breads like Pita & Lavash Chickpeas Bulgar wheat	Pasta Leavened Bread Rice	Semolina Flat breads
Other	Yogurts and fresh cheese	Tomatoes More sauces used	Dried Fruits Spices used abundantly Stews and tagines

# GWEN'S BLENDS

— SPICE HOUSE —

## SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 7

SEPTEMBER 2023

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Welcome to issue 7 of *Spice, The Variety of Life*.

Don't you LOVE the new logo?

All the credit goes to my wonderful, talented and generous friend Logan!

In the next two issues, we are going to look at African Cuisine. Like the Mediterranean, Africa has a diverse and rich culinary history. We will look at the north, central and east African regions in this issue and then head further south and west to the rest of the continent in issue 8.

I hope to hear from you and, as always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Enjoy!

## Gwen

### In this issue

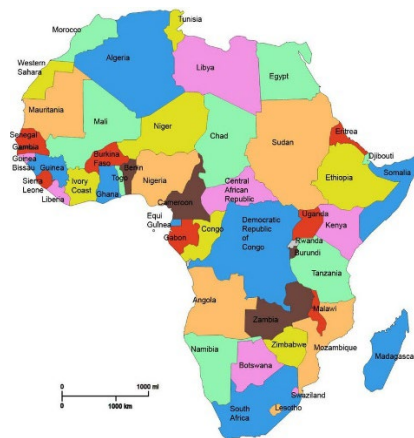
African Cuisine – Part I

Spice of the Month - Cloves

The Exchange

What's new at Gwen's Blends

### African Exploration



While many people consider the birthplace of modern civilization to be Mesopotamia, (which is now Iraq and Egypt), the true roots of humankind began in Africa. The oldest known fossils of humans dating from 2 million years ago all come from there. Primarily nomadic, the human species continued to evolve for millennia before they moved north to settle in the valleys of Mesopotamia, where they began to put down roots. However, many of the tribes chose to remain in Africa and continue the nomadic life.

Referred to as the “Dark Continent” by Henry Stanley, {the famous explorer of “Dr. Livingstone, I presume” fame,} for its seemingly impenetrable terrain, Africa remains, to this day, somewhat of a mystery to most of the western world. The sheer size of the continent and the

obstacles to exploration (the vast and unforgiving Sahara, towering mountains, and thick, dense forests) made exploration a challenge. That may be one of the reasons that so many different European countries colonized various parts of the continent. No single country had the resources to conquer the entire continent. From England, France and Italy to Spain, Portugal, Belgium, and Germany the cultures they brought over added to the already diverse indigenous population.

On the opposite side of the coin, as colonization took hold, the transport of Africans to the Americas through the slave trade, brought their agriculture, their techniques, and their flavors to the entire Atlantic coast from South America up to Canada. Without the influences of African cuisine, we would not have many of the flavors and techniques that we take for granted. From Cajun to barbecue, the gift of African cooking and agriculture enriches our lives much more than we know.

So, how do you describe African cuisine? Like the Mediterranean, there are regions that share similar characteristics, perhaps influenced by geography and climate. There are five regions: Central, East, North, South and West.

The North African region is made up of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt. We touched on these countries briefly in our Mediterranean tour. Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria were colonized by France, Libya by Italy, and Egypt by the United Kingdom. They share a common culture and language. They also share the Sahara. Most of the land is not arable due to lack of water (only 5% of Libya is farmland). That being said, the Mediterranean coast and Nile valley are fertile enough that many crops such as wheat and other grains, olives, citrus, grapes, potatoes, and dates grow exceptionally well.

North Africa also factors highly in the early days of the spice trades as a waystation of sorts, so the variety of spices there is hard to beat. Large open-air markets called “souks” stock amazing assortments of food items from all over the world.



Tagines and stews are the common with legumes, tomatoes, lentils, rice, corn, and other fresh vegetables. Meat, while not ignored or slighted, is not quite the mainstay as it is here in America. Chicken, goat, and seafood are the primary choices. Slow cooked with a wide variety of spices, north African cuisine is the “comfort food” of Africa.

East Africa, encompasses the areas around Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya and the Sudan. Here the life is harder. The lack of real farmland and the droughts of recent years have dealt quite a blow to these countries. Most of the population outside of the cities make their living as herders of cattle, sheep, and goats. They are not raised as a source of nutrition, but rather as a source of wealth. Most inhabitants farm small plots for grain and vegetables as their primary source of food. That does not mean that they do not eat meat, just that most farmers that keep large herds of livestock, do so to sell at market for slaughter and in this region only what is needed to sustain life is taken, the rest are allowed to roam the savannahs around the villages.

Oddly enough, in recent years one of the most successful crops in Ethiopia has been ornamental flowers, most notably, roses. Why on earth would you grow roses when food is so desperately needed, you ask? Well, it turns out that you can buy more food with the money made from selling the flowers on the global market then you could grow with the same resources.

Perhaps the one of the best-known foods from this region is called “Wat” an Ethiopian stew with onions and berbere a spicy mixture of hot peppers and other flavors. To that may be added vegetables, lentils, or meat.

Berberere is central to authentic Ethiopian cooking. It is a very spicy blend made mostly of peppers with a few other aromatics added. In fact, berbere is the Ethiopian word for pepper. Fasten your seatbelts and have plenty of rice handy, it packs quite a punch!





Central Africa, the areas around Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Congo and Gabon, were settled by Portuguese and Belgian explorers. This is the Africa that many people envision. Game plays a large role in the diets of the people who live there. Antelopes, warthogs, crocodiles and even elephants can be found on dinner tables. Goat and chicken are raised as well. Yams, bananas, plantains, and okra supplement the meals as well as a large assortment of vegetables and grains. It is here that the consumption of many insects such as crickets and cicadas are a valuable source of protein.

As is common in north Africa, slow cooking takes front and center. Many of the meats are tougher than beef and this method of cooking coaxes the most enjoyable meals out of it. Stews and soups are filled with delicious assortments of ingredients complemented by rice, bread, or other starches.

One thing all three of these regions have in common is flavor. Whether spicy, savory or even sweet, the flavors are powerful and in your face. As a relatively new initiate to African cuisine, I have to tell you that I am really enjoying the uninhibited use of spices and the combinations of flavors. I think you will too.

### Spice of the Month



### Cloves

Cloves are the dried flowers of an evergreen tree that was originally from Indonesia, although most commercial cloves now come from Zanzibar and Madagascar. They are a close relative of the Myrtle shrub we see all over the area with its bright pink clusters of blooms.

The uses of cloves extend far beyond cooking. Through much of the world they are ground, wrapped in paper or cornhusk and smoked. The aroma is very familiar, but they take some getting used to.

The essential oil derived from cloves can be used as a mold preventative, a historically accurate wood preserver, as well as in candles and other home fragrance devices. Cloves is the key ingredient in many non-chemical flea repellents for pets.

It is in the culinary world, however, that they show their best qualities. From holiday punches and mulled wines, to baking, with a stop in savory cooking along the way, they are incredibly versatile.

While many people associate cloves with holiday baking, they are also used quite extensively through the middle east and northern Africa in savory applications. Mixed with allspice, cinnamon, cardamom, and pepper, it adds a fresh flavor to chicken and red meat. It also works well on roasted root vegetables, rice, and other grains.

Check out the blends containing cloves on our menu in The Exchange, below.

### The Exchange

As mentioned above, Gwen's Blends has several varieties that incorporate the clove.

Ras el Hanout - This Moroccan spice literally translates to "Head of Shop". Conversationally, it means "Top Shelf" for the assortment of rich spices used to create the blend. This blend is more of a floral, sweet profile, than spicy and savory. It complements lamb, game meats, rice and couscous and other foods prepared in tagines.

Pumpkin Spice - An American phenomenon, pumpkin pie spice is synonymous with fall, finding its way into coffee, baked goods, and casseroles. The rich blend of warm spices enhances the earthy flavors of roasted veggies, pasta or even pancakes.

Check out your favorite recipes. If you are using 2 or more of the spices in the blend, go ahead and substitute it for the individual spices and see what you think.

Baharat - Baharat is the Arabic word for "spice" This blend comes from the gulf states, with each region having its own spin. This blend is more broad-based, without a specific regional allegiance. It pairs well with both meat and vegetables and lends itself to soups, stews as well as kibbeh or other meat-stuffed pastries.

Bzar - A fragrant blend of spices used widely throughout the UAE, much as garam masala is throughout India. The familiarity of the warm spices such as ginger, cardamom and nutmeg are balanced with coriander, pepper, and cumin to create a blend used daily in most households. Sprinkled in soups and stews or added to ghee for basting or tasting, this blend enhances anything you cook with it.

Hawaij - An all-purpose spice in Yemini cuisine (frequently used in Israeli cooking as well), the word itself means "mixture" in Arabic. It is

primarily used for soups, stews, curry-style dishes, rice, and veggies. It also makes a great rub for meats. The base of cumin, black pepper, turmeric, and cardamom can be augmented by other flavors to take it in a more savory or sweet direction. The sweeter varieties are used to flavor desserts and coffee. This version's flavor experience starts with the strong tastes of pepper and turmeric with a hint of coriander and cumin behind and ending with the lightness of the clove and cardamom.

You can order on the site or drop me an email to place your order. [ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com)

### What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals and Fairs

#### September 9-10

Burke Centre Festival

Burke Centre Park

Saturday – 9:30AM-5:00 PM

Sunday – 10:00 AM-5:00 PM

#### September 23-24

Fall Riverfest, Occoquan

Market Street, Occoquan, VA

10:00 AM-5:00 PM both days

#### October 7

Art on the Avenue

Amount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria, VA

10:00 AM-5:00 PM

#### October 13-15

Capital Area Craft Fair

Dulles Expo Center

Chantilly, VA

Friday, October 13 – 10:00am-5:00pm

Saturday, October 14 – 10:00am-5:00pm

Sunday, October 15 – 10:00am-4:00pm

## NEW!!

### SingleShots

A line of single use packets, with recipes, to whip up a quick meal or snack.

\$4.00 each

#### Varieties

Bulgogi Marinade

Jerk Chicken

Slow Cooker Beef

Korean Ground Beef

Giardiniera

Quick Pickles

Spiced Candied Pecans

Sweet & Spicy Nuts

Herbed Butter

Ranch Dressing

Not available online yet, please order directly or stop by the booth at one of our festivals this fall.

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I'll add them to the list.

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I'll remove you.

[ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com)



[Check out the website  
www.gwensflavorblends.com, you never know  
when something new will show up in the store!](http://www.gwensflavorblends.com)

## Next Month

African Cuisine, part 2

Spice of the month

Allspice

# GWEN'S BLENDS

— SPICE HOUSE —

## SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 8

OCTOBER 2023

[WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM](http://WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM)

[GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM](mailto:GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM)

Welcome to issue 8 of *Spice, The Variety of Life*. In this issue, we are going to look at African cuisine from the western and southern regions of Africa. This will complete our journey through the “dark continent”, although we have barely scratched the surface of the wonders of African cuisine. If you want to learn even more, may I suggest:

*In Bibi's Kitchen: The Recipes of Eight African Countries that Touch the Indian Ocean [A Cookbook]* by Hawa Hassan (Author), Julia Turshen

This collection of stories and recipes is a wonderful read even if you aren't feeling brave enough to try the recipes. You can feel the love of food and cooking emanate off the pages.

The next stop on our world tour will be Latin America. It's more diverse than you think!

I hope to hear from you and, as always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Enjoy!

## Gwen

### In this issue

African Cuisine – Part 2

Spice of the Month - Allspice

The Exchange

What's new at Gwen's Blends

### African Exploration Part 2

These remaining two regions have more in common with each other than the other three simply due to the fact that much of this part of the continent was settled by only three major colonizers. Western Africa was settled primarily by the British and French, while the southern countries have primarily been settled by the British and Portuguese.

Western Africa is made up of some of the smaller countries on the continent. Ghana, Nigeria, Mauritius, Mali, and Ivory Coast are the most noted.

With the majority of its land bordering on the coast, it should come as no surprise that seafood plays an enormous role in the cuisine. In addition, with more arable land than much of the continent, millet, sorghum, peanuts, and rice grow well adding a very starchy component to western African food. Meat is not a huge component, but when cooked, it usually in the form of stews with wonderful thick broths and plenty of vegetables. Peanuts and soy are used as the protein in many preparations.

One noted exception is Suya. “Suya” translates to “Kebab” in the Hausa language. Suya can either refer to the technique of preparing the meat, or the dish itself. Popular as a Nigerian street food, it consists of thin strips of meat marinated in the Suya seasoning, a spicy mixture of peanuts, chilis and other accents, and then grilled and served with raw red onions.



It is a wonderful blend of spicy and savory that really should be a required culinary experience for anyone calling themselves a foodie.

The southern end of Africa, made up of South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and several other smaller nations will be our last stop. From the lush, tropical coastline of Mozambique to the arid stretches of South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, southern Africa is a study in paradoxes. The cuisine reflects the political, geographic, and socioeconomic range of this region.

Mozambique, settled by the Portuguese, is a fertile land with a long coastline making access to seafood easy. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy with rice, maize sorghum, and cassava as the primary crops. One of the most well-known dishes is Peri peri. “Peri” is the Swahili word for “pepper” and is a chili that was first grown in Africa. Peri peri seasoning is a spicy blend of that chili with the undertones of ginger, paprika and cardamom. It is most well known for being used on chicken, but it is wonderful on shrimp and other seafood as well.

The Bantu’s migrated to the southern areas around the time of Christ and grain was needed to feed the herds of cattle, sheep and goats that sustained them. Millet, peanut, sorghum, and wheat make up most of the crops grown in southern Africa.

The excessive heat meant that food spoilage was a very real concern. The drying of meat was common, the result called biltong. Smoking was a primary method of drying. The milk from cows was turned into yogurt as it soured, again, preserving a resource.

Starches, made into porridges or added to vegetable stews, are a large part of the traditional meals in Zimbabwe while meat remains a mainstay in South Africa.

While researching African cuisine, I learned more about the wisdom of the ancient and how millennia spent scratching out a living in some of the harshest conditions on the

planet led to agricultural techniques that modern science is only beginning to recognize as efficient and productive as they are.

In harsh climates, where arable land is at a premium, most indigenous peoples learned to make the most of what they could grow. Grains and legumes are both wonderful sources of protein, but each is missing certain amino acids necessary for health. Together they provide the perfect balance, hence the predominance of both in many early diets. You see it throughout history, over many cultures, rice & beans, corn & beans, etc. Perfect combinations!

Most natives used to grow their beans and grains together in the same fields until Europeans showed up and taught them to grow nice, clean fields with only one crop at a time. We now know that when planted together, beans and grains have fewer weeds, suffer from fewer diseases, are more drought resistant and grow faster.

Another lesson we are rediscovering is that when you talk about sustainability and the ability to produce enough to survive, an acre of grains produces 5 times more protein than that same amount of grain fed to cattle yields. Grow legumes and produce 10 times more, grow leafy greens 15 times more. (Francis Moore Lappe “Diet for a Small Planet” 1971). If you’re living in places where arable land is in short supply, it makes sense to produce the most that you can with what you have. That is why so much of African cuisine revolves around non-meat items.

### Spice of the Month



### Allspice

Allspice, named in 1621 by English explorers to the West Indies because it smelled like cinnamon, black pepper, cloves, and nutmeg all at once, was originally native to Jamaica, it is now grown on several other islands in the region. It is in the myrtle family and the berries are harvested green and left to dry in the sun. It is known as pimento on the spice trade market because of the dried

berry's resemblance to peppercorns. In fact, one of the common names for it is Jamaican pepper.

As that name implies, allspice is a central component in Jamaican cooking as well as several other Caribbean cultures, most notably Jerk. Jerk is a method of preparing meat for cooking over an open fire incorporating a dry rub or marinade with allspice and scotch bonnet peppers as the primary ingredients.

Outside of the Caribbean allspice is relegated to primarily the sweeter side of the kitchen, with one exception. Allspice is what gives Cincinnati Chili its distinctive flavor.

Allspice is reputed to promote good digestion and its essential oil is often used as a topical anesthetic.

So, by now you know I love sharing obscure facts and I learned one during my research into Allspice. The Arawak natives from the west indies used allspice to season the meat they smoked and preserved on a structure built out of sticks and called a "boucan". Europeans who learned this technique were called "boucaniers" which ultimately led to the word "buccaneers". Boucan also gave rise to the term barbacoa which we learned about when discussing barbecue.

## The Exchange

Who's ready to try some new flavors?

Check out these spice blends:

Peri Peri (2 oz) – Paprika, Onion, Garlic, Coriander, Oregano, Parsley, Ginger, Cardamom, Salt, Cayenne (available in a spicy variety with more cayenne upon request)

\$6.00

Suya (6 oz.) – Peanuts, Chicken Bouillon, Paprika, Cayenne, Ginger, Onion, Garlic

\$10.00

## What's new at Gwen's Blends

October 7

Art on the Avenue  
Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria, VA

10:00 AM-5:00 PM

October 13-15

Capital Area Craft Fair  
Dulles Expo Center  
Chantilly, VA

Friday, October 13 – 10:00am-5:00pm  
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Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I'll add them to the list.

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I'll remove you.

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Check out our website

[www.gwensflavorblends.com](http://www.gwensflavorblends.com)

Next Month

Latin American Cuisine

Spice of the month

Coriander

# GWEN'S BLENDS

— SPICE HOUSE —

## SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 9

NOVEMBER 2023

[WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM](http://WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM)

[GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM](mailto:GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM)

Welcome to Issue 9 of *Spice, The Variety of Life*.

Latin American cuisine has much in common with many of the other cuisines we have explored, in that, while each region has its own identity, there are still several themes that run through all of them.

Many of the dishes and customs we will cover may be more familiar to you, but that does not mean they are any less interesting to explore.

I hope to hear from you and, as always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Enjoy!

**Gwen**

### In this issue

Latin American Cuisine

Spice of the Month - Allspice

The Exchange

What's new at Gwen's Blends

### Latin American Cuisine

As with Africa, Latin American cuisine is the result of indigenous cuisine combined with the influence of the European colonizers (primarily Spain and Portugal). Add to that the plants and techniques that accompanied the slaves brought over from Africa and you have quite a wide range of flavors.

While each country has its own identity, there are some common threads throughout the region. Lunch is usually the biggest meal of the day, shared by the entire family, fruits and vegetables are used as flavoring agents in addition to being eaten for their own merit, sauces are one of the most important elements of a meal, and corn plays an important role.

Mexico, colonized by the Spanish, represents the type of Latin American cuisine that most Americans recognize. The traditional diet of the native peoples was primarily composed of chili peppers, black beans, corn, tomatoes, squash, and local wildlife. The Spanish introduced beef cows, pigs, and other livestock as well as onions and garlic for flavoring. The gulf and Pacific coasts also abound with fresh seafood. A perennial favorite, molé poblano, comes from the central region.

Central America located between North and South America and under Spanish influence for over 300 years, has a rich culinary history like many of the other regions. However, one main difference is that chili peppers do not play a huge role in most dishes, except in Guatemala. The fertile land



and warm temperatures allow a wide range of produce to be grown.

Central America is where masa harina, (corn/maize ground and treated with lime) originates. Tortillas, pupusas and empanadas filled with delicious combinations of meats, starches and vegetables grace many a family table. Hearts of palm, coconuts and other fruits play an enormous role.

Coconut and other fruits play a large role both as desserts and as midday snacks. With the likes of banana, papaya, pineapple, plums, and melons found easily, it is no wonder.

South America is a rich combination of old and new world ingredients and techniques. Chimichurri, a delicious sauce associated with Argentinian cuisine is mostly comprised of ingredients brought over from Europe, garlic, onions, olive oil, and oregano. Quinoa, and amaranth are indigenous, as well as corn, potatoes and manioc.

The long coastlines also provide large quantities of seafood. Ceviche is very popular. The use of the acid in lime juice is used to cure the seafood, making it not only safe to eat, but delicious.

Argentina and Brazil are both well known for their flair with beef, Peru has introduced its traditional chicken to the world, Bolivia shares its Sopa di Mani (a peanut based soup filled with beef, potatoes onions and carrots), Columbia introduced us to arepas, and Uruguay gave us Asado as a way of cooking meat.

The Caribbean brings yet another flavor profile to the table. While, on the surface, the similarities of corn, vegetables, and beans would lead one to think the flavors are also similar, but that would be incorrect. Rice and Beans, traditionally flavored with garlic, onions tomatoes and hotter spices, is replaced by Rice and Peas, flavored with coconut milk and thyme. Plantains provide another starch element not used in the other Latin American regions.

The introduction of sofrito, a puree of tomatoes, parsley, cilantro, pepper, onion, garlic, and other herbs, brings an earthier flavor due to the herbs themselves. Sofrito is used as a base for many soups, stews, and sauces. Adobo, a base for sauces and stews, can be a dry rub, or liquid used with vinegar to marinate meats and seafood, bringing a salty, sweet flavor.

The other side of the Caribbean profile is the use of the spices: allspice, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves. This is where

you see the influence of the Africans who were brought over to work on the sugar cane plantations of South America and the cotton fields of North America. The spices they brought over from the northern coast of Africa took hold in the similar climate and helped shape the Caribbean flavor profile.

### Taco Tuesday anyone?

How did the taco we all know, and love get here? As Mexican Immigrants came to the United States to work on the railroads and other construction projects, they brought their traditional lunches with them, soft tortillas filled with spicy mixtures of fish, organ meats, rice, and vegetables.

Initially, they were sold on Mexican food carts in the Los Angeles area in the early 1900's. Those early traditional tacos began to merge with American tastes (more mainstream cuts of meat and cheeses) and by the 1920's the taco we now recognize was emerging and when Taco Bell opened in 1962, a mainstream snack was born.

Now, the desire for a return to the origins of the taco has resulted in the appearance of old school Taquerias, serving dishes that resemble the original meals enjoyed by the immigrants that introduced us to their cuisine.

### Spice of the Month



#### Allspice

Allspice was so named in 1621 by English explorers to the West Indies because it smelled like cinnamon, black pepper, cloves, and nutmeg all at once. Originally native to Jamaica, it is now grown on several other islands in the region.

Allspice is in the myrtle family and the berries are harvested green and left to dry in the sun. It is known as pimento on the spice trade market because of the dried berries' resemblance to peppercorns. In fact, one of the common names for it is Jamaican pepper.

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meat for cooking over an open fire incorporating a dry rub or marinade with allspice and scotch bonnet peppers as the primary ingredients.

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### The Exchange

If you would like to try creating your own Latin American flavors, check out our [Taco/Fajita Seasoning](#) and our [Adobo Seasoning](#). Both are available on our site.

You can also give Jerk flavor a shot with our new [SingleShot Jerk Chicken Seasoning](#), also available online.

While I may not subscribe to Pumpkin spiced *everything*, Fall IS a great time for Pumpkin bread. Here’s a recipe to try.

#### Pumpkin Bread

##### Ingredients

2c AP Flour  
  
¾ c Salted Butter, softened  
½ tsp Salt  
2C Sugar  
1 tsp Baking Soda  
2 Eggs  
½ tsp Baking Powder  
1 15 oz. can pumpkin puree  
1T [Gwen’s Blends Pumpkin Pie Spice](#)

Oven temp: Preheat to 325°

##### Instructions

Grease and flour 2 loaf pans.  
Combine Dry ingredients (except sugar) in a bowl and whisk.  
Beat butter and sugar until blended and then add eggs, one at a time. Continue until light and fluffy.  
Beat in pumpkin.  
Once pumpkin is incorporated, add dry ingredients slowly, mixing on low speed until thoroughly combined.  
Put batter in pans and bake 65-75 minutes until toothpick comes out clean.

### What’s new at Gwen’s Blends

Hot Chocolate Season is here!

This year, Gwen’s Blends has introduced its line of flavored Hot Chocolate. Flavors include:

Cayenne  
Chai  
Cinnamon  
Ginger Snap  
Mexican  
Pumpkin Spice  
Ras el Hanout

Each packet contains enough for 4 6oz. portions or 2 large mugs full and they are priced at \$4.00 each.

#### Robinson Secondary School Marketplace

November 11, 9am-3pm  
5035 Sideburn Road, Fairfax, VA

#### Occoquan Holiday Fest

December 2, 11am – 7pm  
December 3, 11am – 4pm  
River Mill Park  
Mill Road, Occoquan, VA

## Next Month

### The Year in Review

#### Capital Arts and Crafts Festival Winter 2023

December 8-10

10am – 5pm Fri & Sat

10am – 4pm Sun

Dulles Expo Center, Chantilly VA

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I'll add them to the list.

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I'll remove you.

[ggattsek@gmail.com](mailto:ggattsek@gmail.com)



Check out the website,

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You never know what might show up there!

# GWEN'S BLENDS

— SPICE HOUSE —

## SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 10

DECEMBER 2023

[WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM](http://WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM)

[GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM](mailto:GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM)

Welcome to issue 10 of *Spice, The Variety of Life*.

We've spent the last 7 months traveling the globe, exploring new flavors and cuisines. Now we are going to circle back for a bit of reflection on the year behind us and look ahead to where we are going.

I hope to hear from you and, as always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Enjoy!

*Gwen*

### In this issue

A look back

A look forward

The Exchange

What's new

### A look back

When I began this journey to create Gwen's Blends, I thought that I knew where it would/could take me. I thought I knew why I was taking it. I thought I knew what I would achieve, beyond sobriety. I was wrong all the way around. Yes, there are bits and pieces of my initial expectations floating around, but it turns out that my original goals and expectations were way too short-sighted and limiting. I thought I knew a whole lot more about myself than I apparently do.

At the beginning, I thought it would be fun to create seasoning blends that would help people enjoy exploring new tastes and enhancing old favorites. Sharing food with friends, lots of them! Kind of like a really big hug. That part was spot on. I have had a blast meeting everyone at the fairs and festivals and talking about food and our experiences with different flavors and techniques. I also love being in my workroom mixing and tasting new ideas for blends. Even the failures bring knowledge and a certain amount of humor (along the lines of "what were you thinking using that much cayenne?").

Watching peoples face light up as they smell a blend they are unfamiliar with never gets old. Nor does that look in their eyes as they start thinking about where and how they can use that new blend. Opening doors for people to broaden their horizons is something I cherish. I was at a fair and a young woman walked into my booth, she couldn't have been more than 14 or 15. She told me she was trying to learn to cook but wasn't sure how to go about it. We talked for a few more minutes and she told me she liked pasta, so I handed her a bag of Italian spices, told her how to use it and asked her to email me and let me know how it went. The next day, she came back to the fair, walked into my booth, told me she tried my suggestion, and her family loved it! She was so excited! It made my day. Opening the door to a

whole new experience and introducing the love of food to someone is amazing! Fun is nice, but joy is another whole level. A level I never anticipated or expected, but a level I am learning to love.

When I decided to start the newsletter, I thought it would be a great way to market Gwen's Blends, to build a customer base online, and possibly create a place for people to share recipes and ideas. Simple, easy, just another task on my Gwen's Blends to do list. Well, you guessed it, underestimated this too. Turns out I love doing the research, learning new, fun facts, and passing them along. I also never really thought I would enjoy writing, but apparently, I do, and you all seem to like what I write, so it works out well.

When you combine the interactions with all of you at the fairs with the love of learning, it opens my eyes to all the possibilities for Gwen's Blends. One, in particular, has really captured my attention. So many of you have come into the booth asking for blends without certain ingredients, such as salt and gluten. Garlic and onions can have an inflammatory affect, pepper can interfere with some medications, and I am sure there are other food interactions that I haven't learned about yet. What if I were to try and develop lines of spice blends that allowed people with certain restrictions to still experience the joys of new food experiences? Not to replace what I have, but to expand Gwen's Blends' reach.

I have spoken with some of you individually about what I have in stock that meets your needs and what you would like me to attempt to create. This has gotten me thinking about reimagining some of the blends I currently have in different ways. Can I make a tasty barbecue rub without garlic and onion? How many more options can I offer without salt? What are good substitutes for garlic and onion? All of these ideas and more are running through my brain. I'll be honest, it's a lot! If any of you have any thoughts or ideas about this, please let me know. *(I will include a list of current blends that are salt-free and fructan-free at the end of the newsletter.)*

From a simple desire to spread the joy of good food and have a good time doing it, Gwen's Blends has developed into so much more. What I thought would be a fun hobby that could potentially pay for itself has turned into so much more and I have all of you to thank for that. So, here's hoping that 2024 brings as much growth and joy as this year has and I look forward to seeing and hearing from all of you next year.

Be well!

Gwen

## A look forward

As I mentioned in the previous look back, there are lots of possibilities for Gwen's Blends to pursue. While the subject of food sensitivities has taken the lead currently, it by no means excludes other routes. Herbs have long been known to have healing qualities. While I will never claim that my products are in anyway appropriate treatments for any diseases or disorders, we can certainly examine what science does know about the benefits of consuming many of the herbs and spices we use on a regular basis.

Another topic worth exploring (at least I think so) is how our food gets to us. From hunter/gatherers to the mercantile to the grocery store, there have been many inventions and innovations that have made Instacart and Pea Pod from Giant possible.

Along the way, diets, food fads and even nutritional advice have gone through their own evolutions. Some better than others (think tacos vs jelly molds).

All of these food topics are interrelated, and all are a part of how and why we eat what we do today. Some of the information out there is helpful and some is just plain fun.

For example, did you know that:

Canola oil stands for **Canadian Oil Association**

Crisco stands for **cr**ystallized cottonseed **oil** (the **y** was changed to **i** by marketers)

So, with all of that being said, I wish you all a very happy holiday season, but more importantly, I thank you for the gifts you have given me.

Take care and hope to see you all soon.

Gwen

## The Exchange

### Salt-Free varieties

Avo's Portuguese Allspice

Baharat

Blackened Seasoning

Garam Masala

Garlic Herb Salt free

Hawaij  
Herbs de Provence  
Italian Seasoning  
Jamaican Curry  
Lebanese 7 Spice  
Panch Phoron  
Shawarma

Garlic/Onion-Free varieties

Avo's Portuguese Allspice  
Baharat  
Café Mocha  
Garam Masala  
Hawaij  
Herbs de Provence  
Jamaican Curry  
Lebanese 7 Spice  
Panch Phoron  
Pumpkin Pie Spice  
Za'atar

Current R&D

Ranch and other dips  
Chili Powder/Some sort of spicy blend

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Check out our new Rubs. From Texas Style to Brisket to  
wild fowl and game.  
\$9.00 each

December 8-10  
Capital Arts & Crafts Fair – Winter  
Dulles Expo Center  
Friday & Saturday 10-5  
Sunday 10-4

**January**

Taking the month off to re-charge.  
Email us or visit [www.gwensflavorblends.co](http://www.gwensflavorblends.co) to place your  
order.

Know someone who would like to join us? Send  
their name and email to me and I'll add them to  
the list.  
Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know  
and I'll remove you.  
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you never know when something new will show up  
in the store!