

May's Spice is: Mint

There are many varieties of mint; the most widely known are spearmint, peppermint, Corsican mint, applemint and pennyroyal. Mint grows so profusely that more than 25 varieties are now found wild world wide.

Spearmint is native to temperate climates of the Old World and is even mentioned in Roman Mythology. Hippocrates and Dioscorides wrote of the medicinal benefits of mint. According to the Judeo Christian Bible the Phariseas paid their taxes in mint, anise, and cumin.

Spearmint and Peppermint oils are among the most important flavoring today. England began producing large quantities of mint oil in the late 18th century. By 1796 around 3,000 pounds of oil was being extracted by steam distillation from the mint grown on 100 acres in the Mitcham Gardens in Surrey. A century later the U.S. became a major producer of high grades of mint oils. This grading system meant that the oil contained fewer contaminants and could be sold for a premium.

Today mint oil is still produced through steam distillation. Dried mint is produced by dehydrating the leaves until they contain about 10% moisture.