

# December's Spice is: Sumac

## Plant:

Sumac is a member of the anacardiaceae family that is found across the Mediterranean. There are also species native to the Eastern United States and Canada as well as the Himalayas. Of the roughly 150 varieties of rhus berries there are only six that are suitable for culinary use. Berries are hand picked then dried in the sun. After drying they are crushed then sifted to remove the seeds.

## History:

Sumac has been used for its sour flavor to season meats and vegetables for centuries in the Middle East. The flavor is floral and fresh similar to lemon and is used in a similar manner. The leaves and stems of the plant have been used as dyes due to their high tannin content they have been used to dye leather and were used as an ink. In the Americas sumac was used for its medicinal properties and for a seasoning, it was also used to make a sweet and sour drink similar to lemonade.

## Uses:

In ancient Rome Dioscorides recommended the use of sumac for menstrual and gum ailments and as a hair dye. The Natchez used the roots of Lemon Sumac to treat boils and the leaves were mixed with tobacco and smoked. The Smooth and Staghorn varieties were used by indigenous Americans to remedy diarrhea, asthma, colds and rashes.