

January's Spice is: Allspice

Plant:

Allspice is the dried unripe fruit of the *Pimenta dioica* tree, an intensely aromatic evergreen with a smooth greyish bark and dark green glossy leaves. Also called pimento from the Spanish word for pepper as that is what Columbus was hoping it was. The trees are indigenous to the Caribbean and Latin America. Trees begin to fruit after seven or eight years, but peak in production between years fifteen and a hundred.

History:

Allspice gets its name from its flavor, a seeming mix of cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg. The trees were harvested for pimento umbrella and walking sticks for Europeans and Americans. The unripe fruit of the tree are harvested and left in the sun until they turn brown and the seeds inside rattle they are then ready to be used as spice.

Jamaican Native Arawak and Taino people used the berries for flavor and to preserve meats that were smoked over wood framed barbeques. The native cuisine mixed with that of the slaves brought from West Africa, namely Ghana, to create what is now known as traditional Jamaican Jerk. Across Europe and the United States allspice was used in custards, puddings and other desserts. In Scotland and Ireland allspice was added to the brines used to pickle meats, namely beef and cod.

Source: O'Connell, John, *The Book of Spice: From Anise to Zedoary* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2016), 24-30.