

October's Spice is: Cloves

Plant:

Eugenia aromatica: Cloves are native to the volcanic islands of the Moluccas (Maluku today). Young trees are conical, but will become cylindrical as they age. Clove trees have glossy green leaves and bunches of red or crimson flowers. The spice is the berry of these trees. The entire tree is said to smell of the spice and trees can be productive for up to 150 years.

History:

Cloves have been found in archeological digs dating to around 1700 BCE near modern day Iraq that is over six thousand miles from where they originated.

During the Age of Discovery Cloves were the main reason

Magellan set off on his journey to the east. Portugal had a monopoly on the trade of Cloves and Spain wanting them for cheaper sent Magellan to find a way through South America to the Moluccas. The Portuguese maintained their monopoly until the Dutch East India Company defeated them in the 17th Century. The Dutch would prove to be worse than the Portuguese as they were known to burn Clove crops to artificially inflate prices.

The monopoly on cloves was finally ended when Pierre Poivre smuggled seedlings to Mauritius in 1770. By 1799 the Dutch East India Company was bankrupt.

Today the world's top clove producers are Indonesia, Madagascar, Tanzania, Comoros and Sri Lanka. The largest usage of cloves today are Indonesian kretek cigarettes.

Uses:

Cloves have been used to freshen breath since 200BCE in China.

Cloves contain the chemical compound Eugenol. It is this compound that gives cloves their unique aroma and medicinal qualities.

Clove oil has been used for centuries in toothpaste and gargles, as a remedy for toothache, as a local anesthetic and to treat ulcerations and inflammation.

Their pungent aroma makes cloves a natural choice for perfumes and soaps, it is often found in Pumpkin Pie Spice and Fall scented candles.