

SPANISH HERBS IN THE KITCHEN

1. SAFFRON

In this way we begin our journey with a very distinctive condiment, especially because of its color: *Saffron*, also called “red gold”, is the **world’s most expensive spice** that is obtained from the stigmas of the Crocus flower.

To achieve 1kg of this appreciated condiment, it takes thousands of flowers, as each contains only three stigmas and the process of growing and harvesting is very laborious. Harvesting takes place between October and November and it must be done during dawn to ensure the highest quality. Saffron is highly valued in gastronomy all over the world.

In Spain it is cultivated since more than a thousand years, especially in the region of La Mancha. In our workshops we roast it quickly to enhance its flavor, before adding to one of the most emblematic dishes Spain has to offer: **the Paella**.



2. ÑORA

Continuing with our selection of Spain's essential herbs and spices, we have the *Ñora* – a red, **round pepper** of the “ball variety”, which is normally dried in the sun and used ground in countless dishes and products.

It is a widely used ingredient in Spanish cuisine that provides a distinctive color and flavor- a little sweet with an intense aroma, but without being spicy (although there are two varieties- so watch out).

They can be served fried as a side dish, but above all they are used for the production of paprika powder, an indispensable ingredient for the preparation of various dishes like Galician octopus, “chorizos” and other sausages, “patatas bravas” and rice, like Paella. Also you can grind the dry *ñora* with other ingredients like garlic in order to add it to a “sofrito” (vegetable sauce).



3. LAUREL

The *laurel* or *bay leaf* is another classic in almost every kitchen, but did you know that it is a very versatile shrub as well? Its leaves do not only provide characteristic flavors (slightly spicy and bitter) to **slow cooking dishes** like soups, stews, casseroles, rice, meat or fish, but you can also get oil from its berries for **medicinal use**.

Furthermore its hardwood is used in Andalusia for inlay and marquetry work (an artisanal Arabian tradition). The leaves of this valuable condiment are normally used as a whole and removed from the dish before serving, but they can also be ground.

This herb comes originally from the Mediterranean region and is associated with victory because of its use in ancient Rome as a crown of triumph.



4. GARLIC

Garlic in a dish definitely makes the difference- it goes from bland to tasty (it is indeed a natural flavoring) and we would even dare to say that it provides it with “soul”. Although it is so small, it’s very powerful and that in many ways.

Once again it comes from Asia and it has been cultivated already for thousands of years. Its name in Latin is very curious, because it means “strong” or “burning” and especially raw, it’s very fitting.

You can enjoy it in many forms: raw in a ripe tomato salad; fried and crunchy with oil, lemon and salt as a salad dressing; slowly fried and spread on bread; as an **essential ingredient in many cold summer** soups like “gazpacho” or “ajoblanco” or aioli; there is also pickled or smoked garlic for the real brave one.

Take into account that the way of preparation influences the flavor, but even the way of cutting it, where it is preferable to crush it, rather than to slice it; like this it releases all essential oils and achieves strong and rich notes.

It is also said that **you should not use iron tools** during the preparation- so take out this mortar again!



Moreover, it is a **very healthy** ingredient, because it acts as an antibiotic, it reduces the blood pressure and cholesterol, among many other virtues. And there is one more curiosity: a *blackgarlic* exists, which is obtained naturally by controlled fermentation at low temperature.

It has even more properties and today it's one of the most innovative and surprising elements in modern cuisine, although it has been used in Asia for centuries.

5. ROSEMARY

The name of the next herb is beautiful and means translated from Latin into Spanish "dew of the sea" (rocío del mar), due to its close settlement to the coast.

Rosemary is popular in **traditional Spanish cuisine**, with many different uses and benefits. It's a shrub that grows wildly throughout the whole Mediterranean basin and as a medicinal plant, it has great effects on our health.

As for the gastronomy, it works very well with roasted dishes prepared in the oven like potatoes, lamb, rabbit, goat- contributing with a distinctive nuance. You can add it to casseroles or stews, use it for flavoring oils and cheeses, there is rosemary honey and tea or put some on top of the paella when you let it rest before eating it.

But you don't always have to eat it, it can also be used as a natural air freshener, putting a sprig between your clean laundry or, why not, in a relaxing bath.

