

island spice



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Consider the nutmeg. Casually sprinkled atop holiday eggnog or baked custards, it seems almost as an afterthought. Yet nutmeg is much more than a garnish on a holiday drink.

Earthy, aromatic, hauntingly sweet—with a punch—this spice both complements and enhances the flavor of many foods including pears, blueberries, peaches, spinach, potatoes, winter squash and pumpkins, and creamy sauces, like béchamel. It's even added to some Indian spice blends. Sometimes it's a star player, as in our Pear Pie with Nutmeg and Vanilla (see page 31). Sometimes it plays a supporting role, softening the hot spices in gingerbread and melding flavors in a spice cake or cookie. It's essential in both the sweet and savory kitchen.

Nutmegs are the seeds of an apricot-shaped fruit that grows on a shiny-leaved evergreen tree; Latin name *Myristica fragrans*. These trees, which take up to 15 years to produce fruit, love tropical conditions, ocean breezes and volcanic soils. When the fruit ripens, it splits open, revealing its treasure - two different yet related spices; the shiny black nutmeg, wrapped in a web of scarlet-hued mace. Even the fruit that harbors the nutmeg has purpose. It might be sugared and dried, used to make ice creams and desserts. In Grenada, it's even made into jam.