

# Nature's pantry

From piquant pimentón to aromatic olive oils, Spain is home to an array of heady condiments and spices that will transform your cooking

Passion has long been the cornerstone of Spanish cuisine. To a Spaniard, food is about so much more than just sustenance; it's a way of life. That's why every ingredient, down to the smallest drop of olive oil or the tiniest dash of pimentón, is nurtured with love and care. If you're looking to liven up your cooking with a taste of Spain, condiments and spices are the way to go for an injection of flavour with minimal effort. These are just some of the wonderful staples you should add to your pantry.

## OLIVE OIL

Spain's extensive mountain slopes, mild winters and long, hot summers have made it a prime spot for olive cultivation. Indeed, more than 350 million olives are grown across the country every year, so it's little surprise Spain is the world's largest supplier of olive oil. Picual from Andalucía is one of the most distinguished varieties, adored for its herbaceous aromas, which include grass leaves, figs and tomatoes.

Cornicabra, grown mainly in central Spain, is also a popular choice thanks to its zesty flavour and fuller consistency. Whether you're making a simple Spanish omelette or going all-out with a seafood-heavy paella, these oils will undoubtedly elevate your dish.

## VINEGAR

Sweet and bitter vinegars are also prevalent in Spain. From salads and gazpacho to pickled vegetables, vinegar can add an aromatic element to every type of cuisine. If you prefer sweet varieties, the PDO Vinagre de Jerez is a deeply fragrant, mahogany-hued sherry vinegar that's aged for a minimum of six months, while PDO Vinagre de Condado de Huelva is sharp and dry with a dark, chestnut colour. For something in between, try PDO Vinagre de Montilla-Moriles, a sweet and sour variety made from Pedro Ximénez grapes.

## SPICES

Before the arrival of the Moors, seasonings other than salt were used sparingly in the Iberian Peninsula. Today, it's a very different story. Famed for its subtle flavour (some say it's

floral, while others detect honey notes), saffron is intrinsic to Spanish fare and is a key ingredient in the Valencian paella. In fact, Spain leads the way in quality saffron, with its PDO Azafrán de La Mancha considered the best in the world.

Pimentón, a red powder that's formed by drying and crushing red peppers, is equally celebrated. Often used to give cured meats, like chorizo, a rich flavour and colour, the spice is also used to season Galician-style octopus, traditional stews and plenty more.



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