Why Spanish ingredients are worth their salt



The country's larder is bursting with the finest produce, from fiery spices to preserved fish and vegetables – all perfected over centuries by generations of passionate artisans



There's a reason the flavours of Spain are instantly recognisable. Seasoning from salt flats, smoky pimentón, precious saffron... the region's unique ingredients,

and the care and attention that go into bringing them to the table, are what make its dishes so special.



stamens of the delicate crocus flower. It enriches dishes around the globe and is

worth more than its weight in gold. Azafrán de La Mancha saffron, with its

protected designation of origin (PDO) status, is considered the best. It has aromas of dry hay with floral hints and a bright red hue, and a flavour profile that begins with a slight bitterness and mellows to ripe grain and toast. Just a pinch of this precious ingredient is enough to impart big flavour and bring that familiar yellow to the country's much-loved paella. Resplendent with ruby red peppers and scarlet tomatoes, together they make up the colours of the Spanish flag.



Everything is done by hand; tending the soil; harvesting the crocuses; separating the stigmas; and arranging them in layers to be gently toasted over hot coals. In

autumn the towns of La Mancha celebrate their efforts at the annual saffron harvest.



sea salt, with light, soft crystals; airy in consistency, subtle in taste and perfect with fish. Production takes place on the Santa Pola Salt Flats of Alicante, a

on a small scale

nature reserve of almost 1,600 hectares inhabited by 40 species of birds and fish. Other luxury varieties include salt flakes or sea salt flavoured with lemons, tomato and basil, red wine, ginger, and even rose petals - often hand harvested

Old flames

Pimentón or Spanish paprika is one of the quintessential flavours of Spain, A touch of this special spice gives a distinctive sweet, smoky signature to chorizo, soups and stews. In Extremadura's La Vera valley, the fields blaze with an intense red from crops of peppers that originally came back from America with the Conquistadors. Columbus brought the first pepper seeds - Capsicum

Well preserved In winter months, cooks reach for canned fish and vegetables and Spain's longstanding tradition of preserving produce picked at its peak means quality all year round. The best anchovies in the world are from Cantabria - on a par with Ibérico ham, truffles and caviar for gourmet status.



draped on top of a salad of crisp lettuce with boiled eggs and pungent aioli or

served solo with a chilled glass of white wine.

caught by the almadraba technique, used for upwards of 3,000 years in the area. In ancient times nets were attached to land on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar to catch the fish on their migration; now a system of nets suspended between boats is used to ensure sustainable quotas are adhered to. Spanish molluscs are excellent too, such as clams and cockles typically

The growing and canning of vegetables in Extremadura, Andalusia and Catalonia follow traditions going back generations. Star products include vibrant asparagus from Aragón and stalk vegetables such as cardoon and borage from

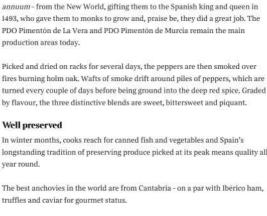
preserved in brine, octopus canned in olive oil and squid in its own ink.

In regions like Murcia and Valencia, and around the Ebro valley, Navarre and La Rioja, just-picked asparagus, peppers and artichokes are preserved. And in all areas of Spain, tangy tomato puree and sauce are fantastic.

Navarre's preserved PDO Pimiento del Piquillo de Lodosa peppers are a soughtafter delicacy, for their silky texture and sweetly fragrant, slightly hot flavour.

Peppers from Nájera in La Rioja are a tapas favourite as are the smoky Bierzo peppers from León. Bittersweet artichokes like the ones from Tudela in Navarre (PGI Alcachofa de Tudela), with their layers of leaves and flavoursome hearts, taste equally good

Visit foodswinesfromspain.com to find out more about the flavours of



The tradition of tinning tuna began with exceptional albacore from the Bay of Biscay - and now Spain is the world's second largest producer of tinned tuna. On Andalusia's Cádiz coast, PGI (protected geographical indication) tuna is

the region