

## FOOD NIGELLA

The spice is one of the seeds used in many famous spice mixes in several countries. In eastern India, it is part of a very popular five-ingredient spice mix used extensively in Bengal called Paanch Phoran. The other ingredients are fenugreek, mustard, fennel and cumin seeds. Changing or increasing the quantity of nigella in the recipe will spoil the taste and appearance of that dish. Vijay Sethi, Head Chef, Punjab Grill (Lite Bite Foods) adds, “Nigella seeds have little odour, but when ground or chewed they develop an oregano-like scent. The taste is aromatic and slightly bitter; I have seen it called pungent and smoky and even compared to pepper. There is some amount of pungency in unripe seeds that are not yet completely dry. The spice is mostly used for vegetable dishes and I think it tastes best with aubergine and pumpkin which are the vegetables widely used in Bengal. Like several other Indian spices, the flavour of nigella is enhanced after toasting in a hot dry pan, or frying in a little oil.”

Known around the world by many names because of its ancient popular history and medicinal value, nigella contains over 100 valuable nutrients. It is comprised of protein, carbohydrates, fibre, iron, calcium, plant fats and oils. “Traditionally, Nigella has been used in India for a variety of conditions and treatments. These include respiratory health, stomach, kidney and liver function, immune system support as well as an anti-allergic, antioxidant and antiviral food,” says Rashmi Ghale, co-founder of PurpleBasil. Though nigella seeds have medicinal value, consuming them in larger quantities can lead to lower blood pressure or lower blood sugar, so it is advisable to use them in moderate quantities while cooking. With an increasing focus on using seeds in cooking, the popularity of nigella is only bound to increase.



Sweet potato toast with addition of beet hummus, olive oil, grilled chickpeas, sunflower seeds and nigella



Martaban de charra aloo



Samosa with lamb and nigella stuffing



Wholegrain sandwiches with salmon, tomato, nigella and arugula



### TIPS FOR COOKING WITH NIGELLA

- Nigella seeds can be used in toppings for baking.
- If used too much it can make the dish bitter, so use sparingly.
- Store nigella seeds in an air-tight container.
- It has a nutty, peppery taste that adds value to any curry, stew and dal and is either dry-roasted or tempered in oil before being added to such recipes.
- Toasted nigella can be added to citric pickles to balance the flavour and improve digestion.
- For starters, toast them lightly to release the essential oils.
- Do not put the nigella seeds directly into oil.
- Do not over-burn the nigella seeds while toasting.

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