

SEED SPICES OF THE RAJASTHAN - PRESENT STATUS AND FUTURE THRUST

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What exactly spices are? Encyclopaedia Americana defines spices as "Products of plant origin for seasoning food to give flavour and aroma". Chambers Dictionary defines as "aromatic and pungent vegetable substances used as condiments and for seasoning food". The American Spice Trade Association (ASTA) defines spice as "any dried plant product used primarily for seasoning purpose". What so ever the definition may be, the fame of Indian spices is perhaps older than the recorded history and is known the world over as the "Home of Spices". Spices constitute one of the most important and vibrant agricultural/horticultural commodities which has maintained high export potential in the National economics. Besides earning valuable foreign exchange, they serve as a vital ingredients of various recipes and add taste and aroma to food. They add flavour to inspid dishes and a tang to beverages and appetizers. Some are also used in pharmaceuticals, perfumery, cosmetics and several other industries. Since antiquity, spices have been considered virtually indispensable in the culinary art, as they were used to flavour food and beverages all over the world. Their preservative and anti-oxygenic faculties are also esteemed through out the world. It is therefore, no wonder that spices command great value even in ancient and mediaeval times and ranked with precious stones in the inventory royal possessions. India enjoys a pre-prominent position, With an annual output of two million tonnes of spices production in the world. It is also the largest consumer of spices with the domestic needs requiring 1.9 million tonnes, leaving about 1.3 lac tonnes for export.

Among the recorded 107 spices, about 60 are important in terms of domestic consumption as well as export, out of which 12 seed spices are prominent in India. The crops categorized as major seed spices are coriander, cumin, fennel and fenugreek, whereas, Bishop's weed (*ajowain*), dill (*sowa*), nigella (*kalonji*), aniseed (*vilyati saunf*), caraway (*siah zira*), parsley, celery (*ajmud*) and blakhk caraway (*kalā zira*) are minor group of seed spices. The major seed spices accounts for 36% and 17% of the total area and production of spices in the country respectively. The minor spices occupy about 10-15% of the total area of seed spices in India. Rajasthan, the largest state situated in the North western part of India has emerged as "Seed Spice Bowl". Tropical seed spices, such as coriander (*Coriandrum sativum* L.), cumin (*Cuminum cyminum* L.), fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum* L.) and fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* Mill) and minor seed spices like Bishop's weed (*Trachyspermum ammi* L.) Syn. *ajowain* (*Carum copticum* Heirn.), dill (*Anethum graveolens* L.), aniseed (*Pimpinella anisum* L.) and nigella