



Seeds have always fascinated me. As a keen gardener, one of my greatest pleasures has been growing herbs and produce from seed. At one stage I was cultivating more than seventy different varieties of herbs, and every season I would leave selected plants to flower and set seed, carefully harvesting them to begin the next growing cycle. There is something immensely satisfying about holding the future of a garden in the palm of your hand, then months later walking outside to snip fresh herbs straight into a simmering pot.

In the kitchen, seeds are just as remarkable. They are the beginning of countless ingredients we use every day—herbs, spices, vegetables, grains, pulses and oils all start life as seeds. Some are enjoyed whole, others toasted to unlock hidden aromas, ground into spice blends, pressed into distinctive oils, or scattered over bread to provide texture and character. This week we explore culinary seeds as quiet foundation builders of flavour.





Kitchen Haiku

Seeds wait in the palm
Heat wakes their hidden perfume
Flavour begins small

This Week's Focus

Seeds are foundation builders because they contribute flavour, aroma, texture, body and structure. Some provide spice, such as cumin, coriander and mustard. Others provide crunch, richness or thickening power, such as sesame, pumpkin seeds, poppy seeds and pine nuts. Toasting, grinding, soaking or pressing changes how they behave in the kitchen.



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Flavour Lens

Profile

Nutty, earthy, aromatic, oily, textural, concentrated

Behaviour

Intensifies through toasting, releases aroma when ground, adds texture when left whole

Balance Role

Builds depth, provides crunch, carries spice, thickens sauces, supports savoury and sweet dishes

Key Pairings

Herbs, chillies, citrus, grains, breads, vegetables, poultry, fish, sauces, oils



Chef's Insight

A seed is one of the few ingredients that can contribute flavour, texture, aroma, richness, structure, and even the next generation of ingredients. Whether growing in the garden or working in the kitchen, seeds remind us that remarkable cooking often begins with the smallest foundations.

Click for Podcast: [Podcast #13-Seeds.mp3](#)

Ingredient Spotlight — Pepitas

Pepitas are hulled pumpkin seeds, widely used in Mexican cooking for flavour, texture and body. In this week's recipe, they appear in three forms: toasted and blended into the mole, coarsely ground for the chicken crust, and toasted whole for garnish. That range of use makes them an excellent example of how one seed can behave differently depending on preparation.

Kitchen Curiosity

Coriander is one of the best examples of how surprising seeds can be. The fresh leaves and mature seeds come from the same plant, yet they offer completely different flavour profiles. One is green, citrusy and fresh; the other is warm, rounded and gently spicy.

Around the World

Seeds shape cuisines across the world: sesame in the Middle East and Japan, mustard in France and India, pumpkin seeds in Mexico, nigella across South Asia and the Middle East, poppy seeds in Central Europe, and sunflower seeds throughout Eastern Europe.





Kitchen Practice

Technique: Toast seeds gently to release aroma before grinding or adding to dishes

Timing: Toast shortly before use where possible; add whole seeds late when texture matters

Common mistakes: Burning seeds, grinding too finely when texture is needed, using stale seeds

Professional approach: Treat seeds as both flavour and structure; decide whether they should season, thicken, garnish or provide crunch



Practical Applications

- Whole – Bread toppings, salads, pickles, spice blends
- Toasted – Mole, dukkah, curries, stir-fries
- Ground – Spice mixes, rubs, crusts, sauces
- Blended – Green mole, pesto, seed butters
- Pressed – Pumpkin seed oil, sesame oil
- Sprouted – Salads, sandwiches, garnishes

Seed Families

Family	Examples	Primary Contribution
Spice Seeds	Coriander, cumin, fennel, mustard	Aroma and flavour
Oil Seeds	Sesame, pumpkin, sunflower	Richness and body
Garnishing Seeds	Poppy, sesame, nigella	Texture and visual appeal
Thickening Seeds	Pumpkin, sesame, pine nuts	Structure and mouthfeel
Edible Garden Seeds	Peas, beans, herbs	Fresh ingredients and future harvests



A practical application of this week's flavour system

Pumpkin Seed-Crusted Chicken with Green Mole

Roasted chicken breast with a crisp, aromatic pepita crust, served with a vivid green mole prepared from charred tomatillos, poblano chillies, fresh herbs and toasted pumpkin seeds.

What This Dish Teaches

Seeds are not just garnish. In this dish, pepitas provide body to the mole, flavour to the crust, and texture at the finish. Toasting develops aroma, coarse grinding preserves crunch, and blending creates structure.



<https://chefsnotebooks.com/main-courses/pumpkin-seed-crusted-chicken-with-green-mole/>



The Liquid Counterpoint

A chilled lime agua fresca, a crisp Mexican lager, or a lightly herbal Sauvignon Blanc. Each keeps the dish fresh while allowing the green mole and toasted seed character to remain central.



From the Chef's Garden

Saving seed connects the cook to the next season. Letting herbs flower, dry and return to the soil reminds us that flavour begins long before it reaches the kitchen.



From the Kitchen

Toast seeds in small batches and move them constantly. Use coarse grinding when texture is part of the dish.



Chef's Reflection

Seeds remind us that flavour often begins quietly, long before the dish is cooked.


FLAVOUR NOTES
Culinary Seeds
— The Foundation Builders —
Flavour System Focus: Foundations
Culinary seeds bring texture, depth, aroma, and balance — building flavour from the ground up.

INGREDIENT / COMPONENT FAMILY									
Coriander Seeds Citrusy, warm, slightly sweet  • Bright, aromatic • Adds lift and balance • Best for: Curries, salsas, pickles, soups, vegetable dishes	Cumin Seeds Earthy, warm, nutty  • Deep, earthy warmth • Builds sensory depth • Best for: Curries, stews, soups, grains, marinades	Mustard Seeds Pungent, sharp, peppery  • Brings heat and bite • Adds complexity • Best for: Pickles, dressings, sautés, curries, ferment	Sesame Seeds Nutty, toasty, rich  • Adds richness and depth • Great texture • Best for: Tahini, dressings, breads, stir-fries, crouts	Pumpkin Seeds Nutty, creamy, earthy  • Adds body and crunch • Rich in flavour • Best for: Pesto, crouts, salads, soups, garnishes	Fennel Seeds Sweet, anise-like, aromatic  • Sweet warmth • Aids digestion • Best for: Sauces, breads, pickles, fish, vegetables	Poppy Seeds Mild, nutty, delicate crunch  • Subtle texture • Adds visual appeal • Best for: Baking, soups, dressings, cream, sauces	Nigella Seeds Pungent, slightly bitter, oniony  • Distinctive sharpness • Adds complexity • Best for: Breads, pickles, curries, spice blends	Sunflower Seeds Nutty, mild, versatile  • Mild flavour, great texture • Best for: Breads, grains, salads, pestos, garnishes	

SYSTEM FUNCTION (WHAT IT DOES)					MECHANICS / BEHAVIOUR					KITCHEN PRACTICE	
 Builds Flavour Seeds add essential flavour-building blocks.	 Adds Texture Provides crunch, bite, and mouth feel.	 Enhances Aroma Releases aromatic oils when heated or crushed.	 Balances Elements Brings balance to richness, acidity, and heat.	 Unites Dishes Helps bring ingredients together in harmony.	 Releases Oils Tasting or crushing releases flavour and aroma.	 Builds Layers Seeds add layers of flavour and interest.	 Transforms Over Time Flavour develops and intensifies as it cooks.	 Absorbs & Infuses Seeds absorb flavours and aromatics, infuse oils, liquids, and dishes.	 Heat Activation Heat activates flavour compounds.	 Toast for Depth Dry toast seeds to enhance aroma and unlock oils.  Crush for Release Crush seeds to release essential oils and intensify flavour.  Bloom in Oil Add seeds to warm oil to release aroma and infuse dishes.  Use with Purpose Choose the right seed for the right dish and flavour outcome.	

PAIRING LOGIC				APPLICATION / IN COOKING				ADVANCED COMPARISON							
Seeds connect, contrast, and complete.				Dry Toasting To enhance aroma and develop deeper flavour. Spice Blends Use whole or ground seeds to build rubs, powders, and spice mixes. Infuse & Bloom Bloom seeds in oil or butter to infuse flavour and aroma. Crush & Sprinkle Crush seeds to finish dishes with texture and intensity. Baking & Crustings Use seeds in doughs, batters, and crusts for flavour and crunch. Dressings & Sauces Add seeds to dressings, pestos, tahini, and sauces for body and depth.				Coriander Seeds Bright, citrusy, slightly sweet VS Cumin Seeds Deep, earthy, warm and nutty Mustard Seeds Sharp, pungent, forward heat VS Sesame Seeds Rich, nutty, sweet Pumpkin Seeds Creamy, earthy, dry flavour VS Fennel Seeds Sweet, anise-like				Sunflower Seeds Mild, neutral, buttery VS Nigella Seeds Pungent, slightly bitter VS Poppy Seeds Mild, nutty, delicate crunch			

CONTEXT & INTENT	STORAGE / PRACTICAL TIPS	CHEF'S REMINDER
Seeds are small but powerful. They add depth, character, and harmony to every cuisine. Use with intention to build flavour, texture, and balance. From ancient kitchens to modern plates — seeds are timeless.	Store seeds in airtight containers, away from light and heat. Whole seeds keep flavour longer than ground. Toast or grind only what you need. Check freshness — stale seeds lose aroma and impact. Use within 6-12 months for best flavour.	Small seeds. Big impact. They build flavour from the foundation. Respect their power, use with purpose, and let them elevate every dish.

"Great flavour begins with the smallest ingredients."
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Further Reading & Resources

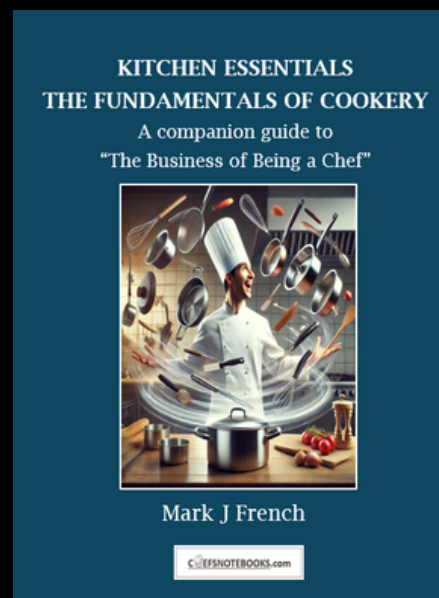
From the Library

See flavour balance charts and acidity mapping in the ChefsNotebooks archives.

Kitchen Essentials

The Fundamentals of Cookery

Beyond the techniques themselves, Chef French emphasises the importance of flavour development. He explores the five basic tastes, explains how to balance flavors, and stresses the crucial role of tasting throughout the cooking process. His passion for quality ingredients and wholesome menus shines through, encouraging readers to appreciate the natural flavours of food.



<https://chefsnotebooks.com/books>

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About the Author

Mark J French is a hotelier, chef, consultant, and author of several books on culinary arts and business. Based in the UK and Philippines, he blends classical training with global flavours.

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