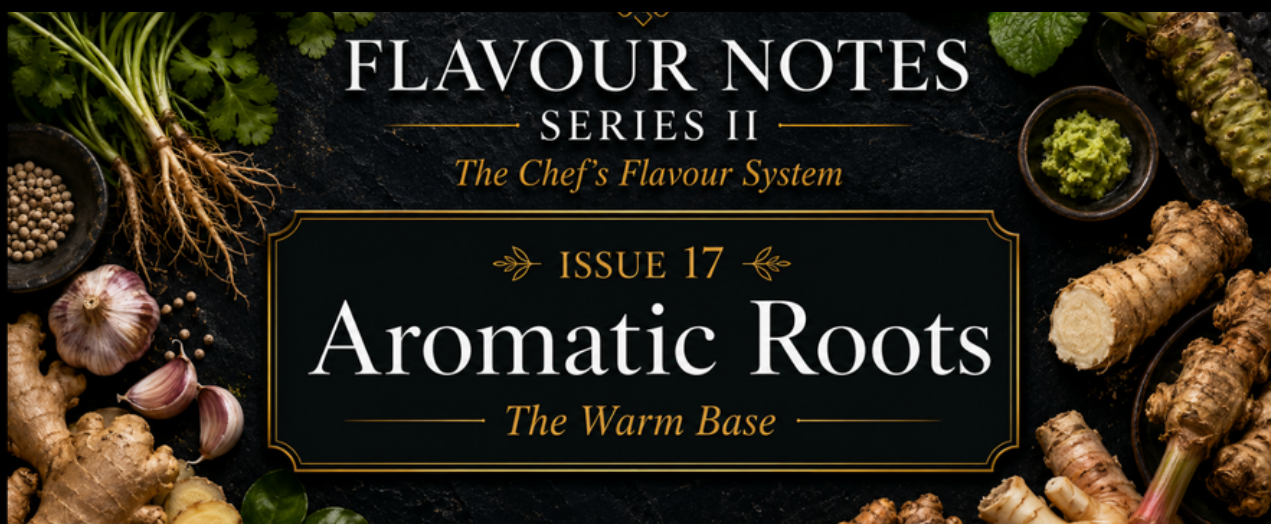




As I write this, I am reminded of studying advanced cookery at Westminster College in London. One day, our lecturer asked whether anyone knew what the French term *racines* meant. Although most of us were already working at chef-de-partie level in leading hotels, no one answered. He was referring to roots and root vegetables—humble ingredients that underpin much refined cooking.

That lesson has stayed with me. Sophistication does not always come from the most expensive ingredient or the final flourish. It often begins with an onion, carrot, piece of ginger, carefully prepared stock—or a root that might otherwise be discarded. Last week, we explored fresh herbs as the finishing layer of flavour. This week, we travel down the plant and beneath the soil to ingredients that frequently go in first. Ginger, turmeric, galangal, horseradish and coriander root each contribute warmth, pungency, colour or earthy depth, helping establish the direction of a dish before its principal ingredient reaches the pan.

There may also be value in overlooked roots, crowns and trimmings, but only when flavour, safety, preparation time and usable yield justify the work.

The broader lesson remains: ingredients need not be glamorous to be important. Often, the quietest component carries the greatest responsibility.





**Kitchen Haiku**

Beneath quiet soil  
Hidden fragrance meets the flame  
Flavour finds its roots

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## **This Week's Focus**

“Aromatic roots” is a culinary term for roots and other underground plant parts valued for warmth, fragrance, pungency, colour and depth.

Not all are true roots: ginger, turmeric and galangal are rhizomes, while coriander and horseradish are roots. In the kitchen, however, they are grouped by function rather than strict botany.

What matters most is behaviour. Pounding releases coriander root's earthy aroma; grating sharpens ginger and horseradish; cooking softens turmeric; galangal withstands longer infusion; and wasabi is most vivid close to service.

The aim is to understand how these ingredients create the warm foundation upon which a dish is built.



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## Flavour Lens

### Profile

Earthy, warm, citrusy, resinous, peppery, mustard-like and occasionally bitter or sweet.

### Behaviour

Cutting, crushing, pounding and grating release aromatic compounds by breaking the plant's structure.

### Balance Role

Aromatic roots provide foundation, warmth, depth, colour, pungency and contrast.

### Key Pairings

Coriander root, ginger, galangal and turmeric build earthy, citrusy and resinous foundations through garlic, fermented seasoning, lemongrass, coconut and warm spices.

Horseradish, beetroot and cream balance sharp pungency with sweetness and richness



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### Chef's Insight

Aromatic roots remind us that flavour development begins before the principal ingredient reaches the pan. Once the foundation is right, the rest of the dish has somewhere to go.

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[Click for Podcast: Podcast #17 Aromatic Roots.mp3](#)

# Ingredient Spotlight — Fresh Coriander

Coriander demonstrates how one plant can serve several culinary roles: the seeds bring warm citrus spice, the leaves provide fresh lift, the stalks flavour stocks and marinades, while the root gives a deeper, earthier foundation for pastes, broths and sauces.

Because roots are often removed before sale, they may seem unfamiliar. Rooted coriander can sometimes be sourced from growers or suppliers; lower stalks are a useful substitute, though lighter and greener in flavour.

## Kitchen Curiosity — Root, Rhizome or Stem?

The kitchen often groups underground aromatics as “roots”, though ginger, turmeric, galangal and orris are rhizomes, while coriander and horseradish are true roots; wasabi is an enlarged underground stem.

These differences affect preparation: coriander root suits pounding, galangal may require removal after infusion, and horseradish is best finely grated close to service.

## Around the World

Across Asia, ginger, turmeric, galangal and coriander root are layered with alliums, chillies, lemongrass, citrus, coconut and fermented seasonings, while Japan prizes freshly grated wasabi for its fleeting pungency.

In Europe, horseradish complements beef, smoked fish, beetroot and cream, while ginger spans savoury dishes, baking, preserves and drinks —always establishing flavour before the finishing touches arrive.





## Kitchen Practice

**Technique:** Pound coriander root, garlic and pepper before adding liquid. Grate ginger for intensity, slice galangal thinly, cook turmeric gently, and grate horseradish or wasabi just before service.

**Timing:** Add coriander root, ginger, galangal and turmeric early; horseradish and wasabi late. Limit acidic marinades for delicate seafood.

**Common Mistakes:** Using woody or poorly cleaned roots, scorching pastes, overusing turmeric, or holding grated aromatics too long.

**Professional Approach:** Use only identified food-grade roots. Wash thoroughly and consider labour, yield and traceability before retaining trimmings.

### Practical Applications

- Curry pastes, marinades and broths
- Grilled seafood, poultry and meats
- Rice, lentils and vegetables
- Condiments, pickles and preserves
- Cordials and baking

### Pairing Logic

Coriander root — garlic, lime, fish sauce, shellfish

Ginger — citrus, soy, pork, duck, chilli

Galangal — coconut, lemongrass, chilli

Turmeric — cumin, lentils, rice, yoghurt

Horseradish — beef, smoked fish, beetroot, cream

Wasabi — raw fish, beef, cucumber, soy





A practical application of this week's flavour system

## **Coriander-Root and Lime Grilled Prawns with Charred Brassica Roots**

Succulent king prawns are marinated with coriander root, garlic, white pepper, lime, fish sauce and palm sugar, then grilled rapidly over high heat.

### **What This Dish Teaches**

This dish demonstrates sequence: coriander root, garlic and white pepper are pounded first to form an integrated aromatic base, then balanced with lime, fish sauce and palm sugar. The prawns are marinated briefly to preserve their texture.

The brassica roots are carefully trimmed, blanched and grilled for tenderness and char. Coriander root builds the foundation, while coriander leaves and mint provide the finish—showing how one plant can work at both ends of the flavour system



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Recipe: [Coriander-Root and Lime Grilled Prawns with Charred Brassica Roots](#)



A lightly sweetened ginger, turmeric and citrus infusion, chilled, lengthened with sparkling water and finished with lime.



**Pound dry aromatics first; grate horseradish and wasabi close to service.**



Compare roots in raw, cooked and grated forms to understand timing and flavour. Use reliable ingredients for core menus, trial variable roots carefully, and record prepared yield.



Humble ingredients often carry the greatest responsibility. Understand the foundation, and everything above it becomes more expressive.



# Aromatic Roots

## The Warm Base

*Flavour System Focus: Foundation*

Roots and underground plant parts valued for their ability to build fragrance, warmth, pungency, colour and depth.

| 1. INGREDIENT / COMPONENT FAMILY                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>CORIANDER ROOT</b><br><br>Earthy, aniseedy, deeply aromatic | <b>GINGER</b><br><br>Bright, citrusy, warming         | <b>GALANGAL</b><br><br>Resinous, peppery, citrus-like | <b>TURMERIC</b><br><br>Earthy, bitter, golden |                                                                                                                      |
| <b>HORSE RADISH</b><br><br>Sharp, volatile, clean             | <b>WASABI</b><br><br>Fresh, piquant, nasal pungency |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pound into pastes</li> <li>• Foundation flavour in curries and soups</li> </ul>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grate, slice or smash</li> <li>• Adds lift, warmth and freshness</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slice thinly or pound</li> <li>• Gives definition to soups and curries</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cook in fat or liquid</li> <li>• Adds colour and grounding depth</li> </ul>             |                                                                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grate close to service</li> <li>• Cuts through richness with pungent freshness</li> </ul>                |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grate close to service</li> <li>• Best used fresh for clean lift</li> </ul> |

### 2. SYSTEM FUNCTION (WHAT IT DOES)

  
**Foundation**  
 Establishes aromatic base of the principal ingredient enters the pan.

  
**Warmth**  
 Brings comfort and warmth without heat.

  
**Depth**  
 Reinforces stocks, broths and marinades.

  
**Lift**  
 Connects flavours and cleanses the palate.

  
**Colour**  
 Turmeric contributes vibrant colour and visual appeal.

### 3. MECHANICS / BEHAVIOUR

  
**Cut / Crush / Pound / Grate**  
 Breaks cell structure to release aromatic compounds.

  
**Cook Early**  
 Ginger, galangal, turmeric and coriander root steepen and sweeten.

  
**Finish Late**  
 Horseradish and wasabi lose their clean intensity through extended cooking.

  
**Clean Thoroughly**  
 Fine roots retain will-rinses to avoid grit.

  
**Use Quickly**  
 Identify ingredients. Only use recognised edible roots and underground parts.

  
**Match Techniques**  
 to Ingredient. Different roots demand different preparation and timing.

### 4. KITCHEN PRACTICE



**Pound Before Liquid**  
Pound roots and dry aromatics before adding liquid.

**Control Heat**  
Fine pastes scorch quickly if overheated.

**Prepare for Purpose**  
Grate for immediate use or infusions, pound for a deeper base.

**Use Freshly**  
Where Needed  
Horseradish and wasabi are best close to service.



### 5. PAIRING LOGIC

 +  + 

 +  + 

 +  + 

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### 6. APPLICATION / IN COOKING

 Curry and spice pastes  
 Marinades and glazes  
 Broths, soups and braises  
 Grilled fish, shellfish and poultry  
 Freshly grated condiments  
 Pickles and relishes  
 Rice, lentils and vegetable dishes  
 Ginger cordials, baking and preserves

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### 7. ADVANCED COMPARISON

 VS   
 VS

 VS   
 VS

 VS   
 VS

 VS   
 VS

### 8. PRINCIPLE IN ACTION



**Coriander-Root and Lime Gr**

## Aromatic Roots at a Glance

| Ingredient     | Character                 | Best Treatment         | Primary Role         |
|----------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Coriander Root | Earthy, savoury, aromatic | Pound into pastes      | Foundation           |
| Ginger         | Citrus, warm, pungent     | Grate, slice or simmer | Warmth and lift      |
| Galangal       | Resinous, peppery, citrus | Slice or pound         | Definition and depth |
| Turmeric       | Earthy, bitter, golden    | Cook in fat or liquid  | Colour and grounding |
| Horseradish    | Sharp, volatile, clean    | Grate near service     | Contrast             |
| Wasabi         | Fresh, nasal pungency     | Grate near service     | Precision and lift   |



## Closing Reflection

"Roots work quietly.

They are often cut, crushed or pounded until their original form disappears. Their contribution may not be immediately visible on the plate, yet without them a curry can feel hollow, a broth incomplete and a marinade without direction. Last week, fresh leaves reminded us of the importance of the final touch. This week, aromatic roots remind us that the first touch matters just as much. Good cooking is rarely built from the surface down. More often, it begins out of sight—in the bottom of the pan, beneath the principal ingredient and, quite literally, beneath the soil.

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## Last Word

"Fresh herbs are not the finishing touch because they are least important. They are the finishing touch because they deserve to be noticed last."

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## Further Reading & Resources

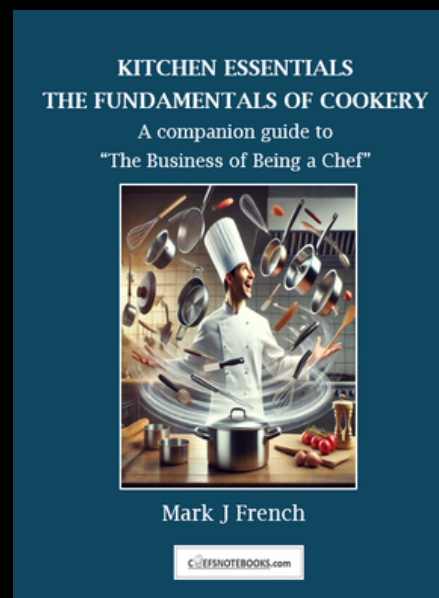
### From the Library

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.