#### TRIPLE DUTY SPICE RACK

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#### INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You've flown the coop and are now living on your own. Probably on a severely limited budget. You want to have a basic herb supply for both health and magical use, yet you can't afford more than what you need for cooking. Which herbs do you buy?

I'm not much of a chef but when I started out on my own, there were a few basic spices I knew I needed in my kitchen. At that time (back in the dark ages before health food stores, much less the Internet), I lived in the heart of the city and my only option was what was available in the baking aisle at the grocery store. I was pleasantly surprised to find that what I used to cook or bake with worked quite well for a headache or a protection spell. You, too, can have *one* rack of spices in your kitchen that will do triple duty.

First, a word or two of advice. If you can avoid it, *don't* buy your herbs or spices at the grocery store. Sure, they'll work just fine but you're paying through the nose. As an example, a jar of bay leaves at the local store costs around three dollars and weighs less than an ounce *including the jar*. Conversely, you can get a full ounce of organic leaves in a ziplock bag off the Internet for around two dollars. Ask the cooks in your family to save their empty spice jars (you can put new labels on them), go in with a few friends (or those family cooks) on an order over the Internet, divvy it up when it arrives and you'll all save *a lot* of money.

The three rules of dried herbs are no heat, no humidity and no light. The grocery store and even your health food store violate at least the last one by storing the herbs in clear containers exposed to a lot of light. Light slowly leaches the good stuff out of dried herbs. Moms all over the world violate the first and sometimes the second by keeping their spices in a cupboard close to the stove where they'll be handy for cooking. The heat from the stove and oven makes its way into that cupboard; the water they boil for pasta adds a lot of humidity to the air. Humidity allows mold and other fungi to flourish.

You however, are going to be proactive about keeping your herbs as fresh as possible for as long as possible. Yes, you'll want to keep some in a kitchen cupboard where they're easy to grab. But you're only going to keep there what you'll use in three to four months. Everything else I want you to put in ziplock bags (squish all the air out before sealing) that are marked with what it is and the date you purchased it. These you'll put in a plastic tub (or at the very least a cardboard box) in the back of a closet away from any heat source. If one of your kitchen cupboards is on the other side of the room from the stove and hopefully on an outside wall so it stays cool most of the time, that's okay, too. Just ensure wherever you store your box is as cool, dark and dry as you can make it. Replenish the kitchen supply from these bags as needed. Most properly-stored dried herbs will last about two years. Check them periodically. If they don't smell like they're supposed to, discard them (in a compost pile if possible) and get new stock.

Although it's not absolutely necessary, I'm going to advocate that you purchase an electric coffee grinder, even if you don't drink coffee. You can find a decent one for around ten dollars. My reason? Sometimes you'll want the whole herb while at others you'll want it ground. (Ground herbs make muddy teas.) Rather than buy both, you can grind just a little when your cake recipe calls for a teaspoon of ground whatever. As a bonus, fresh-ground is tastier – think of

all the restaurants that give you the option of fresh-ground pepper on your meal. There's a reason they do that!

Salt is a staple in every kitchen. Although it's the cheapest, don't buy iodized table salt. Most people don't need the extra iodine. (All salt contains a trace amount of iodine as do many foods.) Refined salt also has aluminum chloride in it to prevent it from clumping. You can accomplish the same thing with a few kernels of uncooked rice in your shaker, which will keep your salt un-clumped. Read the labels and buy the most affordable salt that has "sodium chloride" as its *only* ingredient. That way you have salt for your food with nothing else in it that could affect a magical undertaking.

Now that we've got the basics out of the way, let's move on to the herbs. I did a little snooping around the Internet to find out what cooks consider a good starter set of herbs and spices and came up with a list of thirteen. That's a good number for a witch to have, don't you think? I'll list them alphabetically by the common name on the jars in American grocery stores. I'll also give you the Latin binomial which is the "official" name of the plant. The Latin binomial is essential to know because common names can vary. Those names you won't find on any grocery shelf but you *should* see them listed on a supplier's web page. If you don't, buy somewhere else. You want be certain what you're getting!

One final note: I'll use the common word tea (small "t") for what's really either an infusion or a decoction. Tea (capital "T") is the herb *Camellia sinensis*. To make an infusion (for leaves and flowers), steep one teaspoon dried herb in one cup just-boiled water. Be sure to cover your cup: good stuff is in all that steam and you don't want it to escape. Ten minutes steeping time is a good rule of thumb. To make a decoction (for roots, barks and seeds), put one and one-third cups *cold* water in a pan with your teaspoon of dried herb and put it on the stove. Simmer (don't boil) until your liquid is reduced to a cup. In either case, strain the herb out before drinking or using.

#### (Sweet) Basil Ocimum basilicum

I know a lot of cooks who have a basil plant in a pot on the windowsill in their kitchen. They swear it's better fresh than dried. (It really is but if all you have is dried, go for it.) If you have a sunny windowsill (and, unlike me, no cats to bother it), go ahead and get a plant at the local nursery. Be aware that although it's considered perennial (lives a long time) it's a picky plant and yours may not last beyond a year. If you *really* want fresh Basil but can't keep a plant, buy it in the produce section of your grocery store, strip the leaves from the stems, place them on a cookie sheet and put them in the freezer for a few hours. Store the frozen leaves in a ziplock bag in your freezer, using as necessary – they'll thaw quickly in cooking.

Watch your labels: That basil, while its Latin binomial is indeed *O. basilicum*, is a cultivar. That means it's been bred to taste the way it does. You'll usually find That basil listed as *O. basilicum var. Horapha*. I understand it's more licorice-y than common basil.

**Cooking** Commonly found in Mediterranean and Asian dishes. Goes well with tomatoes, mild cheeses and pork. It's an ingredient in pesto.

**Medicinal** A tea can be used as a wash to combat acne. Drinking that same tea can help with colds, flu, sore throat and coughs. One cup three times per day for most adults. (Write this down. This is the standard dosage of an infusion or decoction for an otherwise healthy adult.)

**Magical** The most widely-known use for basil is in money spells. Carry a leaf in your wallet. If you have your own business (or really like the one you work for) place that leaf in the cash register or use a tea as a wash – especially around the door. It can also be used to keep or attract love. My favorite: give the gift of a basil plant to someone moving into a new home. It confers protection on the house, brings luck *and* is useful in the kitchen!

#### Bay *Laurus nobilis*

You'll almost always find Bay leaves dried. As a matter of fact, I don't think I've ever seen them fresh. At least not on my side of the pond in my climate zone. I know the shrub is hardy to zone 8, so it's probably found in my vacation spots but I haven't noticed it.

**Cooking** Common in Cuban and French cuisine (bay is one of the ingredients in a *bouquet garni*), it goes well in soups (especially bean), stews and marinades. I put a couple in my pot of chili. Bay leaves are usually used whole and then removed before serving.

**Medicinal** Bay tea is a good diaphoretic – it makes you sweat. It's helpful for fevers in this regard. Use that same tea as an after-shampoo rinse to help get rid of dandruff. An ointment is used externally as a rub to soothe arthritis pains.

**Magical** Is where bay really shines. Drink a cup of tea before any divination activity to strengthen your powers or place a leaf under your pillow for prophetic dreams. If you suspect poltergeist activity in your home, burn it during your exorcism and then hang a few leaves up around the house to discourage their return. It's useful in nearly any healing or purification spell.

### Cayenne Capsicum minimum

Who doesn't know Cayenne Pepper? It's not as hot as some but hot enough for most people. It's related to green peppers and jalapeños, which are all the fruit of their respective plants. We may think of cayenne as being red but in reality, it's green when ripe and may or may not turn red when picked.

**Cooking** You can buy whole, dried peppers but it's most commonly found already ground. Cayenne is prevalent in Mexican and Southwestern dishes. It's an ingredient in chili powder (the others being coriander, cumin and oregano). It will add a kick to any vegetable or pasta dish but a little goes a long way!

Note: virtually everyone I know will down glass after glass of water to stop the burn of hot peppers. That doesn't work because the water doesn't neutralize but will actually spread the capsaicin, which is the oil that causes the heat. Instead, drink a glass of milk – full fat is preferable. The fat in the milk will absorb and neutralize the oil causing the pain.

**Medicinal** Use a cayenne ointment externally wherever you need to increase blood circulation: on arthritic joints, sore muscles, sprains, strains, bruises, etc. Be aware that the heat of cayenne will redden the skin and your ointment will stain clothing.

A diluted tea (make a standard tea and then mix one tablespoon of that in one cup hot water) can be used for laryngitis and sore throats; and may settle some upset stomachs. *Do not* drink the standard infusion full strength! It can and will irritate mucous membranes.

Although I can't confirm it, I have read that just a pinch of ground cayenne on the tip of your tongue will stop a migraine – if you can handle the heat.

**Magical** The heat of cayenne will inflame a love relationship – useful for "spicing up" a love life that's become routine. It's also good for breaking hexes.

#### Cinnamon Cinnamomum verum or C. cassia

*True* Cinnamon comes from Sri Lanka and is known as Ceylon Cinnamon. What most of us get is Cassia Cinnamon, which is grown for export in Southeast Asia. There is a slight difference in taste but one only need be concerned about which cinnamon you're consuming if you're on blood-thinning medication. The coumarin content is much, *much* higher in Cassia Cinnamon. Since we're concerned about finances here, buy the less-expensive Cassia Cinnamon if you don't have to worry about coumarin.

What we get as "whole" cinnamon (or cinnamon sticks) is actually the inner bark of the tree, which curls as it dries.

Cooking Ah, the baking. I have too many cake and cookie recipes that call for cinnamon to count. Many mix a little with some sugar and sprinkle that on their morning toast. And who doesn't like a sprinkle of ground cinnamon on their hot chocolate? It's also great on apples, raw or baked. In entrée-type cooking, it adds a little something to stews, curries and chilies. I like it (along with a pinch of nutmeg) with butter on my baked sweet potato or squash. One website even mentioned using it on beef, although I couldn't find a specific recipe.

**Medicinal** Cinnamon tea is a warming drink for someone who has a cold or the flu. In this case, cinnamon is so strong that you're only going to steep ½ teaspoon in your cup of hot water. (I usually just smash about ½ inch of a stick with a hammer.) It's one of the recommended herbs for nausea and may calm the stomach enough to stop vomiting.

**Magical** A pinch of cinnamon strengthens almost any spell from healing to love to protection to success.

## Cloves Syzygium aromaticum

Cloves are one of the oddest-looking spices you'll come across. Those hard little things sold as "whole cloves" are actually the dried flower buds! They are one of the most aromapacked herbs I've come across: where most herbs will lose their scent in a couple of years, I have four-year-old cloves that still smell lovely. (They are, of course, stored according to my guidelines.)

Cooking Cloves are a staple in most holiday (Christmas/Yule) baking. Because they're native to the areas surrounding the Indian Ocean (and you use what's readily available, right?), cloves can be found in the cuisine of Asia, Africa, and the Near and Middle East, lending their flavor to curries, broths, meat and vegetables. Mom always studded our holiday ham with cloves, poking the little, fragile stems into the meat before putting it into the oven (and letting out a string of expletives when the stems broke).

**Medicinal** The aromatic quality of cloves is very useful for opening bronchial passages in the case of asthma or bronchitis. In some people, clove tea will calm flatulence. Cloves' most widely-known medicinal use is to calm a toothache. Most times this is accomplished by putting a drop of the essential oil onto a cotton swab and then gently rubbing the oil over and around the affected tooth. While not quite as effective, the pain will somewhat subside if you make a clove tea and hold the warm liquid in your mouth for a few minutes before spitting it out.

**Magical** The fact that there are a *lot* of flowers on one stalk tells me the herb is useful for things you want to increase...money comes to mind. Nasties apparently don't like the smell because you can use clove both for exorcism and then protection; use it in your smudge mixture.

### Garlic and Onion *Allium sativum* and *A. cepa*

Who doesn't know these two vegetables/herbs/spices? (Take your pick...they're all of them.) They are staples in most everyone's kitchen. Fresh is best unless you want powder, in which case, cut them up into small pieces and dry them thoroughly before running them through your grinder.

**Cooking** Both herbs are grown all over the world and used in virtually every type of cuisine

**Medicinal** The list of therapeutic properties for garlic is almost as long as my arm. It really shines in anything having to do with boosting the immune system...I recommend everyone eat a couple of cloves a day as a preventive measure. Some people can't stomach raw garlic but can handle raw onions. Onions are good in this regard, too. If your stomach doesn't like either, try garlic perls found in the supplement section at the store. They've had the stomachirritating compound removed. This takes out *some* of the beneficial qualities, but not all.

Garlic-infused oil has been used for centuries to help earaches. Warm onion juice will help an earache, too. Just put a few drops of either into the affected ear, let it sit for a few minutes and then tilt your head to allow the liquid to run out.

Foods with raw garlic and/or onion in them are great for colds: they'll help bring down any fevers and start breaking up the mucus that causes congestion, both in your lungs and in your nose. A poultice of either will accomplish the same thing but beware: the raw vegetable and even the juice can cause blistering and contact dermatitis.

It is said if you put slices of raw onion on the bottom of your feet overnight (wear socks to bed to keep them there), you'll break up a cold almost immediately. The soles of your feet have a *lot* of pores and absorb chemicals easily.

**Magical** Use either garlic or onion in any healing or protection spell. Be sure to store them in the kitchen to keep illness from starting there. Put a cut onion in the four corners of a sickroom to absorb negativity and disease. Dispose of them in running water when they turn black.

To induce lust, use plenty of fresh garlic or onion in your cooking.

Cunningham says placing an onion under your pillow will induce prophetic dreams. I'm not sure I'd dream at all: the lump of the onion coupled with the aroma would probably keep me awake! You can certainly try it, though.

### Ginger *Zingiber officinale*

I don't know for certain but my thought is that the Latin name for this herb is where we get the English word, "zing" from. It's definitely zingy! If you didn't know, we use the root of the plant. This is an herb that has a lot of cautions associated with it. If you have health issues, please do some research before taking it internally. (A pinch in cooking should be fine.)

**Cooking** Ginger ale, ginger beer, ginger brandy...oh wait, we're talking about food. Okay, ginger snaps, gingerbread, ginger candy... You'll find ginger as an ingredient in sweet and savory dishes, marinades and stir-fries. It's a staple in Asian cuisine.

**Medicinal** Ginger is famous as an anti-nausea herb and is suggested for both morning and motion sickness. A piece of ginger candy can help, as can drinking a cup of lukewarm (not hot) ginger tea.

It can be used in cases of stopped menses or painful menses but please check with your doctor, first – there's always a reason these things happen and using ginger could exacerbate another issue. Because it's useful for these conditions, you and your doctor should weigh the risks of using ginger for anything if you're pregnant – even morning sickness.

Ginger is a warming herb and I find it useful for the chills that accompany the flu. As well, the pungency is great for breaking up congestion. Once upon a time, in the days before "stay home if you're sick so you don't spread germs", I was a waitress in a bar. I had contracted a horrible cold: my nose was stopped up and I had a scratchy throat. The owner of the bar warmed a shot of ginger brandy, had me inhale the fumes and then drink the brandy. Within minutes, I could breathe and my throat felt better. (The shot of alcohol certainly made the rest of my shift more pleasant!)

**Magical** Ginger adds a little 'oomph' to any spell and if you eat a piece of root before performing that spell, it'll give you a boost, too. Powdered ginger is sprinkled around an office or other place of business to draw success (which, in theory, means money).

# Nutmeg *Myristica fragrans*

What we know as Nutmeg is the seed of the tree. The way more expensive spice, Mace, is the red aril (sort of like a skin) covering the seed casing. They do taste similar but yet different. Be aware that nutmeg and mace are toxic and large doses may cause not only stomach upset but hallucinations. (It was the "high" of choice in Victorian society for this very reason – for those who could afford it, that is. Nutmeg was expensive in those days.)

This is one herb where I'll suggest you buy already-ground nutmeg rather than whole. The seed is rather large and doesn't lend itself well to grinding up just a "little bit", unless you have a specialized spice grater. In addition, except for the good luck charm mentioned below, I've not come across anything that uses the whole seed.

**Cooking** Nutmeg is very prevalent in baking. It's also used in cheese sauces (specifically, béchamel), spinach dishes and on baked squash. I like a sprinkle of it on my café latte or cappuccino.

**Medicinal** Nutmeg is mostly used as a stimulant for the digestive system e.g., sluggish digestion, gastritis and even appetite loss. It is used in combination with other herbs to calm nausea and vomiting. In an ointment, its warming properties are helpful for arthritic conditions.

**Magical** Carrying a whole nutmeg with you will serve as a good luck charm. Put a sprinkle in whatever you're doing to help strengthen your mind, especially if you're working on your psychic abilities. It's an ingredient in many health and wealth spells.

#### Oregano Origanum vulgare

This is an herb that can be confused with another...it's also known as Marjoram *but* it's "Wild" Marjoram. What you see in the stores as Marjoram is the "Sweet" relative. Its Latin binomial is *O. majorana*.

**Cooking** Oregano is used in Mediterranean, South American and Cajun dishes. It can be found sprinkled on vegetables, beans, seafood and in stews. I like to add a bit to my scrambled eggs. Add a pinch to store-bought spaghetti sauce or pizza to make them more flavorful.

**Medicinal** Oregano is one of the overlooked children of the Mint family, although Oregano oil is gaining popularity during cold and flu season for its antiviral properties. It's a stimulant so is helpful for sluggish digestion and to start moving mucus out of your system during a cold or the flu. Some people find a cup of oregano tea helps dispel a tension headache.

**Magical** To me, oregano is a "happy" herb. Use it in spells to promote happiness (especially if you're trying to dispel depression), for healing and to maintain health. It can be used both in food and spells to attract or keep love. Some traditions weave oregano into circlets for the couple to wear at handfastings. It can also be added to mixtures or sachets made for protection and money matters.

#### Pepper *Piper nigrum*

Everyone has pepper in their kitchen, right next to the salt. Did you know? White, green and black pepper are all off the same vine! The color depends on whether the drupe (the fruit) is ripe and how it's processed. The ripening and processing are how the distinct flavors come about. What we know as a peppercorn is simply the dried fruit.

**Cooking** Most people are accustomed to a sprinkle of pepper on their food either right before or right after the sprinkle of salt. According to Wikipedia, pepper is the world's most traded spice, which tells you how much it's used all over.

**Medicinal** The use of pepper as a medicine goes back probably as long as Man has been using it to flavor his food. It's a well-known digestive stimulant and will help with flatulence and bloating. Like clove, pepper can be diluted and used to calm a toothache until you can get to the dentist. Ayurvedic medicine uses pepper to soothe sore throats and calm coughs.

If you're into reading historical texts, I'd ignore the passages that tell you to use pepper for eye complaints. Ouch.

**Magical** Combine ground *black* pepper with salt and sprinkle around your space to dispel negativity – especially that thought to be of an evil nature. Along the same lines, whole peppercorns (color doesn't matter) can be added to protective amulets, sachets or spell mixtures.

Note: I wouldn't recommend burning peppercorns. The resulting smoke can be an extreme eye irritant.

#### Rosemary Rosmarinus officinalis

I will attempt to keep this short. Rosemary is my favorite herb and I could go on forever about it. Most people's introduction to this herb is when they're studying Shakespeare in high school and get to Hamlet. "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance," says Ophelia. Ol' Will wasn't wrong in his statement. The ancient Greeks knew (and modern science is now confirming) that rosemary does indeed help with memory. As a person who has "senior moments", I employ this herb a *lot*.

**Cooking** Because it's a native of the Mediterranean, it can be found in many dishes from that region. It does best with root vegetables; in soups and stews; and with poultry, pork and lamb. If you can get them, fresh stems make wonderful kebab sticks.

**Medicinal** Rosemary's scent is reminiscent of pine and many people find it uplifting so it's a useful antidepressant. I add a few rosemary leaves when I'm steeping a cup of tea for anything of a viral nature, like the flu. It's not specifically antiviral but has antimicrobial properties. Externally, use a rosemary ointment as a rub for the pain of neuralgia and sciatica. (It will redden the skin but all that's doing is bringing blood to the surface capillaries.) That same ointment will help overworked muscles.

**Magical** Rosemary is a powerful cleansing, purifying and protective herb. I use it in place of white sage when smudging and add it to my magical washes. Follow Ophelia's advice and add it to any spell to strengthen mental powers – it's great for studying! It's said that inhaling rosemary's fragrance will preserve youthfulness.

#### Sage Salvia officinalis

There are so many varieties of sage that we'll stick with Common Sage. This is the same herb you put in your turkey stuffing, not the one shamans use. But, like many other plants, it contains thujone, which can be toxic in large doses and cause visions.

**Cooking** I've already mentioned turkey stuffing. It goes well with other poultry, too, and in cheese and vegetable dishes.

**Medicinal** Sage is one of the go-to herbs when you need something dried up. Mothers who are trying to wean a baby will find it helpful as will those whose fevers have gotten to the sweating stage (but not while it's still a dry fever).

Those suffering from hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating) may find both drinking and rinsing the affected areas with a sage tea will aid drying.

Sage's antibacterial properties make it a good addition to mixtures for combating respiratory infections, sore throats, and even tonsillitis.

The tea is used as a wash prior to binding wounds – it will help cleanse the wound and stop bleeding.

Because of the high thujone content, instead of drinking a whole cup of sage tea three times a day, four to six tablespoons each time are all that are recommended.

**Magical** It's a Sage. Therefore, it's good for purification and protection. If you don't have white sage, common sage will work just fine.

Although considered a masculine herb, from strengthening mental powers to promoting wisdom, it's great for women who want to hold their own in the world or just manage their household efficiently. So, it's perfect for single mothers.

### Thyme *Thymus vulgaris*

"Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and..." Many of you will have to google those song lyrics. Even if you don't think you do, google them anyways. You'll be surprised just how old that ballad is.

**Cooking** Thyme is popular in Mediterranean, Cajun and Creole cuisine. It's mostly used with root vegetables and beans. I like it in some tuna dishes and it adds a little something to preparations with button mushrooms. (Those are the ones you find most often at the grocer's.)

**Medicinal** This is another herb with a list of uses a yard long. It's slightly drying (not as much as sage), is most definitely antiseptic and disinfectant... use it internally for colds and flu and the coughs associated with them; laryngitis, bronchitis, sore throats; and even to dry up diarrhea. Externally, use a tea as a wash for wounds or chilblains; in an ointment for arthritis and eczema.

While Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) in amounts used in cooking, it's been reported to affect the menstrual cycle so I'd avoid it if pregnant or nursing. It also contains thujone so read the cautions about that chemical constituent under "Sage".

**Magical** Go back to the long list of medicinal uses. Translate that: it's good for health, healing and purification. It's said that women who wear a sprig in their hair will make themselves irresistible. (Be careful where you place it. Those stems can be woody. You don't want to poke your man's eye out.) The scent is said to confer courage and energy.

#### **CONCLUSION**

So, thirteen herbs (fourteen if you split garlic and onion) to get you started. I honestly can't think of a *common* medicinal or magical problem that can't be solved with one or a combination of these.

As you get another few dollars together, you'll want to buy more herbs. I totally understand. I have more than thirteen, myself. Before you go on a buying spree, though, do your research. What herb will do at least double, if not triple-duty for you? There isn't a single herb in my house (including resins!) that doesn't do at least double-duty. Waste not, want not and all that.

Happy Herbing!

#### About the Author

A semi-retired accountant, Master Herbalist, and witch, Deborah J. "DJ" Martin is the author of non-fiction books about herbs as well as the *Ogre's Assistant* fiction series.

She abandoned frozen Minnesota many moons ago and now lives in the woods of the southern Appalachian Mountains with her husband, four cats and numerous woodland creatures. If you can't find DJ in the garden or visiting her grandchildren, check Facebook <a href="http://www.facebook.com/herbylady">http://www.facebook.com/herbylady</a>, Twitter @herbylady, or her website <a href="http://www.herbylady.com">http://www.herbylady.com</a>.