

FAVORITE FLAVOR BOOSTERS

If you are in a recipe rut or feel like your finished dishes are always missing that special something, try adding some of these secret weapon ingredients into your arsenal:

Pomegranate Molasses – Used primarily in Mediterranean cooking, this molasses is a tart syrup made by simply reducing pomegranate juice with just a touch of sugar. It's a wonderful addition to marinades, dips, salad dressings, and elixirs.

Mirin – Similar to sake, mirin is a sweet rice wine used in traditional Japanese cooking. Use in baking, vinaigrettes, vegetable dishes, sauces, and dips. Add a splash to fried rice or peanut sauce to provide depth.

Ume Plum Vinegar – Umeboshi is a Japanese ingredient made of sour fermented plums. The vinegar is slightly acidic and very salty – use this in place of table salt in soups, sauces, or on meats and vegetables.

Madeira – Ranging from sweet and rich to dry and acidic, Madeira is a fortified Portuguese wine often consumed as an aperitif or digestif, or used in cooking. Suitable substitutions include a dry port, Marsala wine, or sherry. Use Madeira to deglaze.

Tamari – Tamari is Japan's version of soy sauce. Unlike soy sauce, tamari is often gluten free, and has a richer, sweeter, and less salty taste. Combine with maple syrup to add a smoky sweet flavor to any dish.

Maple Syrup – By comparison, real maple syrup is less sweet, richer in flavor, and contains more trace minerals than white table sugar. Use in small amounts to sweeten savory dishes, sauces, or salad dressings or substitute in baking by replacing 1 cup of white sugar with ½ to 1/3 cup, reducing the recipe's liquid measurement by ¼ cup.

Smoked Paprika – Paprika is a spice made by pulverizing a chile or pepper to a fine red powder. Smoked paprika adds a wonderful smoky flavor – similar to chipotle powder but without the spice – that works in nearly every dish.

Cinnamon Sticks – Use sticks in cooking to add a mild and fresh cinnamon flavor. Put a stick in chili, ground beef for tacos, curry, beans, and soups.

Kombu – Because of its mild flavor, kombu is perhaps the most versatile seaweed to use. It is the primary ingredient of dashi – the broth used for miso soup – and is best added to the simmering water of all grains, beans, and soups to provide an abundance of trace minerals. Remove before eating, or for added nutritional benefit, break apart and include in your recipe.

Bay Leaf – Add a bay leaf or two in soups, a pot of simmering grains, boiling potatoes, brines, or tea to impart an earthy sweet flavor. Remember to remove the bay before serving, as the leaf will not soften while cooking.

Maldon Salt – This is a flake salt, harvested off of the coastal town of Maldon in Essex, England and most commonly used as a finishing salt. Sprinkle a little on your brownies, cookies, or savory dishes for a touch of elegance and burst of salty flavor.

Miso – Miso is a fermented soybean paste, most famously used as the chief ingredient in miso soup. Imparting a rich umami flavor, this ingredient can be used in place of Worcestershire, salt, or soy sauce. It is easy to combine with a little water and add in soups, sauces, or combined with butter to top vegetables or meat.

Fish Sauce – This pungent Southeast Asian ingredient is used to add a rich umami saltiness to nearly any savory dish. Dash a few drops into any soup, sauce, dressing or marinade, or drizzle some onto vegetables or meat for roasting.

Black Garlic – Found in specialty stores, black garlic is a soft, almost spreadable ingredient that tastes similar to garlic but without the bite. It is smoky and sweet, earthy and mild. Use in simple dishes to replace fresh garlic.

Preserved Lemon – These salt-cured lemons are a staple of Moroccan cooking, and impart a deep floral and mild lemony flavor. Mince the rind and add to rice, lentils, chicken, or seafood dishes.