

The Pumpkin Flavor is Everywhere this Year

Pumpkin spice-flavored foods are everywhere this year. The flavor is in Pop-Tarts, to cereal to crackers and especially coffee. When you order that pumpkin spiced latte or pumpkin spiced tea, you may be wondering how they got that pumpkin in there.

Pumpkin spice is more accurately called “pumpkin pie” spice – something everyone would be familiar with if they still make pumpkin pie from scratch. Pumpkin pie spice is actually a combination of different spices, including cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and clove or allspice (or both). In fact, you can make your own pumpkin pie spice by combining those ingredients in your own small container.

Commercial pumpkin spice flavoring doesn’t normally use the actual spices, though. The Institute of Food Technologists provides a revealing video and fact sheet at ift.org – search for “Pumpkin Spice 101.”

According to the IFT, instead of using a blend of spices you would find in your cabinet, commercial flavor manufacturers use chemical compounds that provide a consistent flavor profile – cinnamic aldehyde for cinnamon, for example and terpenes for nutmeg. Those are the flavor compounds that emerge when a pumpkin pie is baked, so you wouldn’t necessarily get them from just shaking the spice blend into your homemade coffee.

These compounds are available at a fraction of the cost of the actual spices, and they’re sustainable. The IFT says there’s probably not enough actual spice in the world to supply the seasonal demand for pumpkin spice-flavored coffees, baked goods, cereals, yogurts, liqueurs, candies and other foods and beverages ,

The IFT notes that some pumpkin spice flavorings actually do contain some real pumpkin. But you likely won’t taste it. According to food scientists, the amount of pumpkin puree added is so small that it does not change the flavor or nutritional profile of the food, but it might appeal to people who want to see “real pumpkin” on the list of ingredients in their favorite pumpkin spice-flavored food.

Such foods and beverages are generally sweetened, just as pumpkin pie filling is. You can immediately taste the difference if you sample regular canned pumpkin alongside canned pumpkin pie filling. Not only does the pie filling have the warm spicy flavoring, but is satisfying because of the sweetness because of the sugar added. Canned pumpkin is simply canned pureed pumpkin without all the extras.

This is a great time to use canned pumpkin in your cooking. It is low in calories, is full of antioxidants and potassium. It is great added to chili, breads and other dishes. You can even make your own pumpkin puree by baking a pumpkin like other types of winter squash. Just be sure to start with a pumpkin made for cooking and not for carving. The large jack-o’-lantern types are stringy and bland.

Source: Ohio State Extension