

THE MAGIC INGREDIENT

What can't chefs live without, asks Olivia Palamountain



It's easy to get stuck in a food routine: reaching for familiar ingredients in your favourite deli (or running the gauntlet at your local supermarket) and then churning out the same tried-and-tested dishes. But there are so many more delicious things to taste – most of which, are right

under our noses. I usually leave the weird and wonderful experiments to the professionals but in the spirit of spring and new beginnings, I've asked some of the capital's finest chefs from restaurants spanning global cuisine, to share their favourite unusual essential, and how us laypeople can use it at home.

The chef	The dirt	The dish	The details
 <p>Chef Tong, HKK hkkondon.com</p>	<p>"Chinese mountain yam is considered a rare member of the tuber family. It's a medicinal plant that helps to relieve fatigue in the winter flu season."</p>	 <p>"Slice raw yam into batons for a great salad. Wash carefully to remove the slimy mucilage produced by the plant."</p>	<p>"Try the supermarkets in Chinatown, such as Loon Fung. It'll be labelled either <i>yamaimo</i> (mountain yam) or <i>nagaimo</i> (long yam)." loonfung.com</p>
 <p>Sam Harris, Zucca zuccalondon.com</p>	<p>"Italian pasta eggs come from regular hens fed on a corn-rich diet, giving the yolk a bright orange colour."</p>	 <p>"Imported from Italy, these eggs are amazing for making pasta with, as they retain their colour after cooking."</p>	<p>"Sold at Machiavelli in Covent Garden, specialists in artisan products from all over Italy." machiavellifood.co.uk</p>
<p>Vivek Singh, Cinnamon Club cinnamonclub.com</p>	<p>"Paneer is fresh cheese that makes an excellent substitute for meats and is a good source of vegetarian protein. It's easy to cook and lends itself to a variety of flavours."</p>	 <p>"Use paneer instead of chicken in Indian food, or make a quick stir fry."</p>	<p>"Tesco and Sainsbury's stock paneer, as do Asian supermarkets in Tooting, Upton Park and Southall. It's really easy to find these days and not expensive at all."</p>
 <p>Thierry Laborde, Chabrot Bistrot d'Amis chabrot.co.uk</p>	<p>"<i>Piment d'espelette</i> is a Basque favourite. Not as spicy as black pepper, it has a hint of sweetness. I also love <i>sel de Guérande</i>, considered the best salt in France."</p>	 <p>"Use <i>piment d'espelette</i> as an everyday spice in place of black pepper and <i>sel de Guérande</i> like regular salt."</p>	<p>"The best delicatessens in town ought to stock it. Or go to a smart shop such as Harvey Nichols." harveynichols.com</p>
 <p>Virgilio Martínez and Roberto Ortiz, Lima limalondon.com</p>	<p>"The dry potato is native to the Andes, rich in taste from the soil, and dried naturally by the high altitude. It looks like a white truffle."</p>	<p>"This is a wholefood that you can use to thicken sauces instead of using flour. Or soak the potato overnight then cook it as a ragout."</p>	<p>"There is only one supplier in London: Sol Andino Services Uk, on the Old Kent Road. Ask for Mr Luis Ostolaza." (020) 7394 9203</p>
 <p>Peter Lloyd, Spice Market spicemarketlondon.co.uk</p>	<p>"Kumquats are also known as Chinese oranges. They are the smallest citrus fruit with a sweet pith and tart flesh."</p>	<p>"We serve this in a dressing alongside chargrilled chicken, but add to any salad for colour and sweetness. Make sure to remove the seeds first, as these are bitter."</p>	<p>"The fruit stalls at Borough Market usually stock them." boroughmarket.org.uk</p>

COURTING YOUR APPETITE

Get set for this year's Foodies Festival at Hampton Court Palace, the UK's largest celebration of food and drink. Quite apart from the top chefs in attendance – Gennaro Contaldo, Gary Lee, Steve Drake – there will be masses of live

demonstrations and events to get involved with. Love baking? Join a class in the Cake and Bake Theatre, or simply head straight to the dining area and double-decker 'bar bus' for top-class refreshments. 25, 26 & 27 May, foodiesfestival.com

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