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The Spice Kitchen: Apprenticeship Training in Culinary Skills

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ABSTRACT

Current Dietary Guidelines for Americans emphasize the need to reduce dietary sodium. Spices impart flavor to food, serving as substitutes for salt. In addition, the antioxidant activity of spices can provide health benefits. Dietetic students receive training in basic food preparation and foodservice management however, their knowledge and use of spices can be limited. This article describes the enhancement of their culinary experiences through participation in a class designed to explore the flavors and health properties of 10 spices. The class provided an opportunity for apprenticeship training, exposing students to spices and cooking methods. Student objectives were: 1) to increase knowledge of spices and their potential health benefits; 2) to use flavorful swaps, substituting spices for salt in daily food preparation; 3) to identify and evaluate the intensity of aromas associated with selected spices; and 4) to gain experience utilizing cooking methods that reduce fat in preparation. All of the objectives were achieved based on student responses to pre-, mid-, and post-course evaluations and the completion of aroma charts for each lab. Course challenges such as food costs and space availability were identified but easily managed. To our knowledge this is the first class devoted to spices in a didactic dietetics accredited program in the United States. Training dietetic and other health professional students, about the use of spices to enhance flavor when reducing the sodium, fat and sugar content of foods may be beneficial to their clients who are trying to manage not only their weight but also other medical conditions such as hypertension and diabetes mellitus.

KEYWORDS

Spices; Culinary Class; Dietetic Education; Food Preparation; Antioxidants

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