

MICROSCOPICAL EXPLORATION

TWENTY SEVEN

FESTIVE SPICES FOR CHRISTMAS...A CLOSE LOOK

As is written in the 19th century nursery rhyme, “Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat,” etc. etc.

So, what has this to do with the esteemed publication that is Micscape Magazine I hear you ask?

Well, every year, a couple days before the publication date of the December issue of Micscape Magazine, I turn my attention towards the toothsome Christmas delicacy that is Dry Spiced Beef. This delightful comestible has been enjoyed by many since the dim-and-distant past, and its preparation involves a nine-day marinade in various spices and other culinary chemicals, followed by long slow cooking and overnight pressing under a heavy...ish weight (I use a building brick wrapped in foil).

Details of the amounts of each of the spices/chemicals will not be included here, as this is not written for inclusion in a recipe book, but it might be of interest to list them and to take a close look at each as follows:

Allspice Berries, which are the dried berries of the tree *Pimento dioica*.



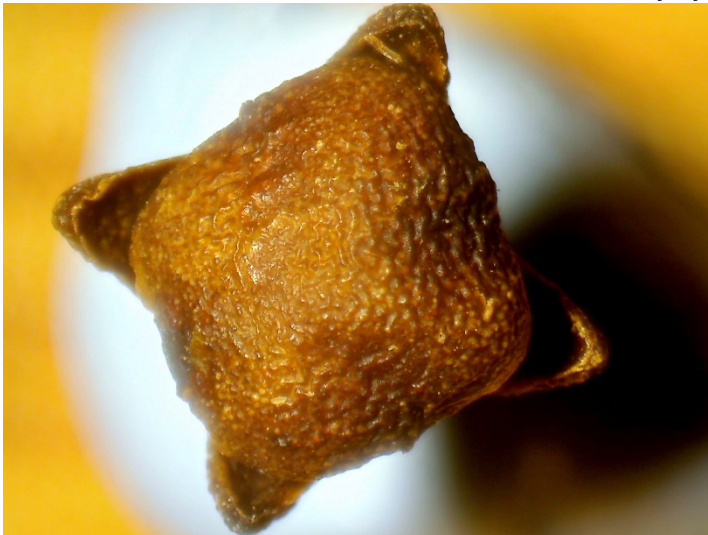
Black Peppercorns, the dried fruit of the flowering vine *Piper nigrum*.



Mace, the seed covering of Nutmeg, the seed of the tree *Myristica fragrans*.



Cloves, the dried flower buds of the tree *Syzygium aromaticum*.



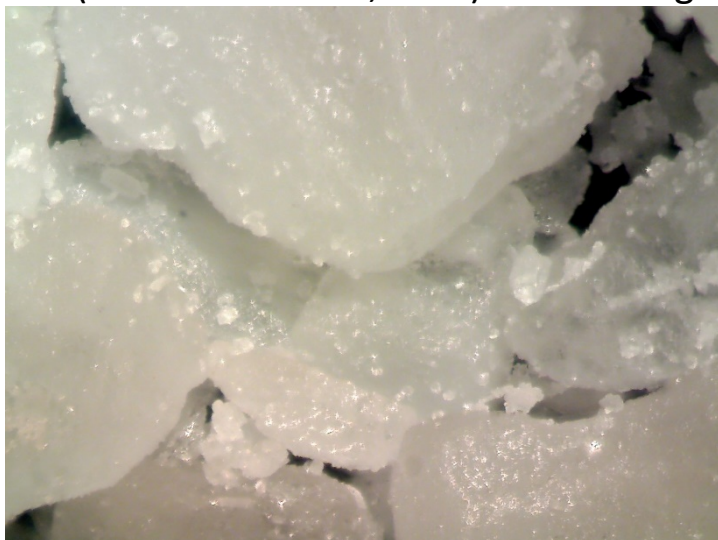
Juniper Berries, the seed cones of the tree *Juniperus communis*.



Saltpetre (Potassium nitrate, KNO_3), a preservative for meat.

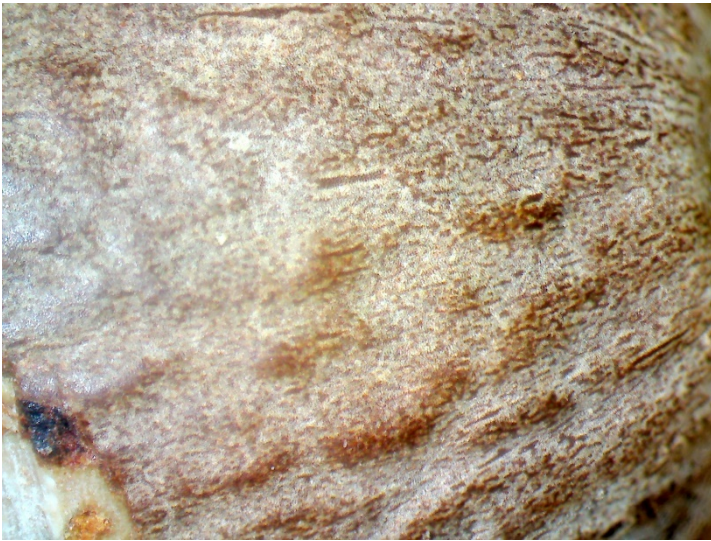


Sea Salt (Sodium chloride, NaCl) a seasoning and preservative for meat.



As an alternative to Mace, Nutmeg can be used and will also be included here.

Nutmeg (exterior)



Nutmeg (interior)



Each of the above pictures is a stack of between four and eight images captured using a 1960s Olympus VA-II stereomicroscope fitted with a Brunel Eyecam Plus eyepiece camera, and the image stacking was achieved using Helicon Focus 8 image stacking software.

As we say here in Cumbria:

Merry Christmas and 'Ave a go yersel'!

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