

Toss Old Spices Seasonally For Best Flavor

(NAPSA)—Friends and family look forward to their favorite holiday recipes, flavors and aromas all year long, so it's the one season people should not leave the quality of their ingredients to chance. Taking stock of basic pantry items, before cooking and baking begins, is an easy way to help ensure that special recipes taste their best.

While it's second nature to use fresh seafood, dairy and produce, many people don't know that pantry staples—including flour, chocolate, nuts, and spices—should be checked for freshness as well. In fact, according to a recent survey of households across America, 56 percent of people say they don't regularly clean out their pantries.

"People may not realize it, but even spices and herbs lose their taste and effectiveness over time," said Steve Logan, executive chef at McCormick. "These ingredients should be replaced periodically for the best flavor."

So, if that bottle of cinnamon has been on the shelf for as long as you can remember, Chef Logan offers these simple tips for recognizing when it's time to T.O.S.S. (Toss Old Spices Seasonally).

- **Sight**—If the color has faded, chances are the flavor has too.
- **Smell and Taste**—If the aroma is weak and flavor is not apparent, it is time to replace it.

To make sure your herbs and spices stay fresh, store them tightly capped and away from heat, moisture and direct



sunlight. With proper care, spices and herbs should retain freshness for the following timeframes:

- Ground spices—2 to 3 years
- Whole spices—3 to 4 years
- Herbs—1 to 3 years
- Seasoning blends—1 to 2 years
- Extracts—4 years, except pure vanilla, which lasts indefinitely

Chocolate-Drizzled Cinnamon Pecan Bars feature some of the season's favorite flavors and are the perfect end to a holiday gathering. Guests will be sure to save room for these delicious cookie bars, which also make great homemade gifts.

Chocolate-Drizzled Cinnamon Pecan Bars

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 45 minutes

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 1 egg, separated**
- 2 cups flour**
- 1 tablespoon McCormick® Ground Cinnamon**

- ½ cup finely chopped pecans**
- ¼ cup semi-sweet chocolate chips**
- ¼ cup white baking chips**

BEAT butter and sugar in large bowl on high speed until light and fluffy. Add egg yolk; beat well. Add flour and cinnamon; beat on low speed until well blended. Press dough out evenly into a ¼-inch thick rectangle on large ungreased baking sheet.

BEAT egg white until foamy. Brush on dough. Sprinkle with nuts; lightly press into dough.

BAKE in preheated 300°F oven 45 minutes or until lightly browned. Cut into 2½ x 1½-inch bars while still hot. Remove from baking sheet. Cool completely on wire rack.

Directions for Chocolate Drizzle: MELT chocolate chips in separate bowls as directed on package. Spoon each melted chocolate into separate plastic sandwich bags, then cut a small piece from one of the bottom corners of each bag. Close the bag tightly, then drizzle the chocolates in a pretty pattern over the bars. Let stand until chocolate is set. Store in an airtight container. Makes about 3 dozen.

For more spice freshness help and holiday recipes, visit www.mccormick.com, or call 1-800-MEAL-TIP (1-800-632-5847).