



Flavor trends Oregano or not?

Oregano is as common as any herb or spice in the kitchen. Every American diner knows it as one of the herbal notes in tomato sauces and pizza. Yet as common as oregano is, there is a lot of confusion over exactly what it is. Many varieties of marjoram, vervain and mint are commonly labeled oregano and the confusion over which plants are oregano has led some food experts to classify oregano not as a specific plant but rather a flavor profile.



The herbal flavor we associate with oregano is the product of its main flavor chemicals, which include carvacrol, thymol, limonene and pinene. These constituents also give oregano antiseptic and antispasmodic properties. Over the years, oregano tea and oil have been prescribed for colds, flu, stomach ailments and infections.

True oregano is a member of the species *Origanum vulgare*. Oregano is closely related to marjoram (*Origanum marjorana*), and is often categorized as a variety of marjoram or "wild marjoram." The most common culinary varieties of oregano are the following subspecies:

Greek Oregano (*Origanum vulgare hirtum*) is the most common source of oregano and cultivars. Greek oregano has dark green, slightly hairy leaves. It is the best culinary variety with the most widely accepted flavor profile.

Cretan Oregano (*Origanum vulgare onites*) is also known as Turkish oregano, rhigani, and pot marjoram. It has rounded, furry, pale gray-green leaves and an

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The word "oregano" is derived from Greek *oros* "mountain" + *ganos* "brightness, ornament."

Pork Souvlaki

The rising interest in both street foods and the cuisines of the Eastern Mediterranean converge in a Greek favorite-souvlaki. Many cuisines have their unique version of grilled skewered meat, and in Greek cuisine it's souvlaki. Though it's not as well known as other Greek dishes, souvlaki is becoming familiar to Americans through gyros stands, diners, coffee shops, tavernas and fine dining restaurants.

Souvlaki has been cited in Greek literature since antiquity, including the works of Aristophanes, Aristotle and Homer. The name souvlaki is a form of the Greek word *souvlak*, meaning skewer. In some parts of Greece the dish is called *kalamaki*, meaning "little reed."



Souvlaki was originally made with lamb, though the term souvlaki can be applied to anything skewered, including chicken, beef and seafood. In all but the most formal Greek eateries, souvlaki is most often made with pork.

The key to this dish is a standard technique of the Greek kitchen- a flavorful marinade. The pork for souvlaki is marinated with staples of the Mediterranean larder: olive oil, garlic, lemon, oregano, sea salt and pepper.

Skewered and grilled, preferably over a charcoal fire, souvlaki can be served as an appetizer, as a sandwich on pita bread, or as a main course accompanied with roasted potatoes or rice pilaf. For authentic souvlaki flavor in a convenient IQF form, Miniат has developed a souvlaki pork dice (X8275).

Oregano

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intense, spicy flavor.

Syraian Oregano (*Origanum vulgare syriacum*), also called Lebanese oregano, is the tallest variety of oregano growing up to 4 ft. in height. It has pale green leaves and reddish stems. It has a pungent flavor and is the type traditionally used in the Middle Eastern spice blend known as *za'atar*.

Italian Oregano, also known as Sicilian oregano, is a hybrid of Greek oregano and marjoram. Its flavor is noticeably sweeter than other varieties.

Some other plant varieties known as oregano because of similar flavor are:

Mexican Oregano (*Lippia graveolens*) is a member of the vervain family native to North and Central America. It has a more intense flavor than Greek oregano and is known for its medicinal properties.

Cuban Oregano (*Plectranthus amboinicus*) also known as Spanish thyme and Indian borage, is a succulent member of the mint family. It has fleshy, furry leaves and a dusty green color.

The next time a recipe, formula or even a slice of pizza calls for oregano, consider the numerous options and enjoy the distinctive herbal note your chosen variety provides.

From the Culinary Center

Souvlaki Pita

2 lbs. 1 kg. Miniat souvlaki pork dice (X8275)
 2 ozl 60 ml. So-Fleece pan and griddle oil
 8 ea. pita
 1 ea. tomato, diced
 1 ea. red onion, thinly sliced
 1c. 250 ml. tatziki sauce

1. Brown the pork souvlaki in oil on all sides for 3 minutes on a 350° F griddle or non-stick pan.
2. Warm the pitas on the griddle 15 seconds per side.
3. Add 4 oz. of hot pork souvlaki to each warm pita.
4. Top each pita with diced tomatoes, thinly sliced onions and 1 oz. of tatziki sauce.
5. Serve immediately.



Souvlaki Pita

Greek Cooking

13 % of consumers cooked Greek food in their homes in 2009.

Source: Gilroy Foods and Flavors

Chain Watch



PANINI • SALADS • SUBS

The Spicy Pickle sandwich chain has a great pickle. Their namesake, served with every sub or panini, is a beauty, a crisp wedge redolent with garlic, coriander and lots of red chili pepper. This work of cucumber art is the calling card of a chain trying to make inroads in the crowded sandwich segment of QSR. The Denver-based chain, founded in 1999, runs 39 restaurants and has 35 more in development in 11 states.

Spicy Pickle's menu is divided into panini, sub sandwiches, salads and pizzetti offerings. In each category 6-8 signature builds are available. In the sandwich and pizzetti sections the offer to build your own creation is highlighted. Spicy Pickle claims their inventory of 10 meats, 10 cheeses, 21 toppings and 15 proprietary spreads, combined with their artisan bread offerings, can produce over 150,000 combinations. This is great for a consumer base that is driven by variety and personalization, but one also wonders about the time and operational challenges that accompany this range of options.

Contrasting the complexity of menu offerings is simplicity in pricing. Spicy pickle has largely adopted the single price format that a few other sandwich chains use. All subs, panini and many salads are all set at a \$6.99 price point. Service is quick-casual requiring customers to wait before their order is served. The décor of its stores is functional and simple with a moderately sized dining area.

The question that remains to be answered is, with the large number of brands competing for the QSR sandwich market, can a great pickle be enough of a draw to another sandwich chain? When its competitors offer artisan bread baked in-house, greater speed and convenience, and lower priced value menus, is a pickle enough?

