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Hibiscus Flower Rub

MAKES 1 CUP

Reminiscent of cranberries and pomegranate in their tartness and color, hibiscus are dried deep red-violet flowers with a tangy, berry-like flavor. Also called Jamaica in Spanish, hibiscus is a beloved agua fresco beverage featured in toquerias and Latin markets (where it is often sold in bags with other spices and herbs). The floral fruitiness of hibiscus is well balanced by the assertive, yet nuanced, variety of peppercorns. This rub is exceptional on fish (see Cedar Plank Salmon with Hibiscus, page 202), but also brightens the flavor of snapper, scallops, and lobster.

- 10 Javanese long peppers (*see Note below*)
- 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns
- 2 teaspoons whole pink peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon whole green peppercorns
- ½ cup dried hibiscus flowers
- ¼ cup packed light brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons fine sea salt
- 2 teaspoons sweet paprika
- 1 teaspoon Piment d'Espelette (*see Note, below*) or cayenne

1. Heat a dry saute pan over medium-low heat and add the Javanese peppers and all the peppercorns. Toast until fragrant, shaking the pan periodically to prevent scorching, about 5 minutes. Spoon the toasted peppercorns into a clean spice grinder or coffee mill. Add the hibiscus flowers. Grind until the mixture is a semi-coarse powder
2. Pour the pepper mixture into a small mixing bowl. Add the brown sugar, salt, paprika, and Piment d'Espelette. Stir to fully incorporate and distribute the ingredients. This may be stored in a covered container at room temperature (away from the heat of the stove) for up to 3 months.

Ingredient Note: Javanese Long Pepper

Javanese long pepper also known as Indonesian long pepper, these long, pine cone-looking peppercorns have a complex flavor all their own. Their warm, fruity-musky aroma has hints of nutmeg and cinnamon without being overly spicy. The Javanese long pepper's distinctive, floral quality is the perfect counterpoint to hibiscus flowers and elevates this rub into something extra special. You can find them in gourmet markets or online.

Ingredient Note: Piment d'Espelette

Piment d'espelette or espelette pepper, is a long red pepper cultivated in the Basque region of France that is mostly available dried. About the same heat scale as hot paprika or cayenne, espelette pepper lends a not-too-hot, fruity finish to many recipes. You may substitute cayenne, if desired, but I highly recommend adding this amazing spice to your cupboard.

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