



CURRY UP AND COOK

BY

SHANKARI ARCOT



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Foreword

As a judge at the 2009 California State Fair Professional Chef Cooking Challenge, I tasted a most extraordinary NY steak. Why, fifteen years later, is this particularly memorable? The NY steak had always been fairly far down the list of my favorite cuts of meat, yet it was the mystery ingredient for the competition. How many was I going to have to chew through, with a disingenuous smile on my face? Who was in charge here and why didn't they have the good sense to have featured a rib-eye? A wasted opportunity in my eyes.

As I tasted a particular entry, the NY steak lithely bumped all other steaks aside to take its place at the top of my "favorite cuts of meat" list. This NY steak was uniquely seasoned with the essence of freshly toasted and ground cumin and coriander – and by someone who knew how. This NY steak was leaning on a chaise of broccoli raab with a happy group of friends; raitha, pulao and vermicelli kheer - alongside special guest, green apple. I suddenly adored the NY steak. The genius behind this creation fittingly won the competition in a unanimous vote.

After the awards were distributed, a friend introduced me to this pretty cook with the confidently set jaw and sparkling eyes. Shankari. I had questions for her about herself and her food. I came to find out that this was the first time she had cooked New York Steak Ever. In her whole life. Ever. Shankari had never eaten NY steak before. Never. Never ever. Mind blown. Big time. I wasn't sure what to think. Maybe I felt a little duped? I certainly was profoundly impressed.

That day marked the springboard to getting my foot in the door and now I'm happy to call Shankari my friend. This means I can ask her for lots of favors. My big ask of her is to be a guest chef-lecturer in my professional cooking courses at American River college. Shankari happily agrees and enters our lecture hall each semester holding her shiny Masala Dhaba in both hands. As soon as she pries off the lid, there is a gasp and murmurs from the students as the fragrance escapes the round, tin spice box.

Shankari shares stories of her family and Southern India and we learn that each amma's curry is uniquely the best. The real Mulligatawny soup will only be made of truly ripe tomatoes and should just "hug itself" before being quickly whisked off the heat. The class eagerly follows her to the kitchen as she leads us in preparing dishes you will find in this book; Channa Masala, Palak Paneer, Turmeric Rice, Aloo Gobi – just name a delicious few. Lots of pictures are taken and the "Indian Day" conversations continue in the hallway after class.

Shankari's talent and hard work have made her the consummate Indian cooking teacher in Sacramento-land. She is a favorite among cooking guests on Good Day Sacramento. Her classes consistently sell out at the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op, Sacramento area community classes, Wellness Within Cancer Support Services and her cooking classes for kids.

You can close your eyes, scroll and land upon any recipe in this book. Cook it. You will be happy. I promise.

Teresa Urkofsky
Professor, Hospitality Management/Culinary Arts
Later In Life NY Steak Lover



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Introduction

Welcome to my first cookbook, Curry Up and Cook!

Cooking has always been a huge part of my life. From playing in the kitchen during my childhood to visiting neighbors, tasting dishes, and asking for recipes so my amma could make them for me, food has always connected me to those I love.

When I arrived in the U.S. in 2000, I felt lost and isolated. I'd call my amma for recipes, often crying when things didn't turn out the way I remembered. Food became my way to feel close to family far away. It's about more than just meals; it's about gathering around the table and sharing good times with loved ones.

In this cookbook, you'll find recipes that mean a lot to me, each with its own story. Like the tandoori chicken I perfected after countless tries, or the lemon rice that was a staple in my school lunches. There's the coconut rice my amma made for my birthdays and my first taste of shrikhand at a tiny restaurant when I was about seven. That first spoonful—tart, sweet, and a hint of cardamom—was pure delight. Food truly excites me, and I love sharing these recipes with my students and watching them discover the joy of cooking.

I believe cooking should be fun and enjoyable, whether you're a pro or just starting out. You'll find a mix of everyday meals and special dishes perfect for any occasion. I hope these recipes inspire you to try new things and create delicious moments. Remember, each dish is yours to make your own. My amma's coconut rice is authentic to me, and what you create will be authentic to your family. Use these recipes as a guide and have fun in the kitchen.

Let's get cooking!

Setting Up Your Kitchen for Cooking Indian Food

Cooking Indian food is all about being prepared. With just a bit of organization, you'll have everything at your fingertips and be able to enjoy the process. Here are a few of my go-to tips to get you started:

Shopping for Staples

When you're stocking up, I recommend shopping at stores that sell spices and grains in bulk. This way, you can buy just a little of what you need—perfect if you're experimenting and don't want bags of unused ingredients taking up space. Once home, store your spices in the freezer to keep them fresh and vibrant for months to come.

Pantry Essentials

Certain ingredients make Indian cooking easier, and having them on hand is a game-changer. Spices like cumin, coriander, turmeric, cayenne, and garam masala are key, and having whole spices like cardamom pods, cinnamon, cloves, and bay leaves lets you layer flavors in ways that make each dish feel special. Stock up on pantry items like basmati rice, canned chickpeas, and coconut milk. Full-fat yogurt and ghee (clarified butter) also come in handy for adding richness and balance to recipes.

Easy Prep for Busy Days

Many Indian dishes call for minced ginger and garlic, and here's a trick that'll save you time. I blend garlic with a splash of neutral oil (like avocado oil) in a food processor, store it in a mason jar, and use it all week. For longer storage, portion 1 teaspoon into each compartment of an ice cube tray, freeze, and pop the cubes into a zip-top bag. You'll have perfectly portioned garlic ready whenever you need it.

As for ginger, grab a micro plane grater, wash the ginger well (no need to peel!), and grate it. For curry leaves, I freeze a few leaves in each slot of an ice cube tray, cover with water, and freeze. Just run a cube under water when you need to add it to a recipe.

Prepping for Tadka (Tempering)

Tadka, or tempering spices, is a technique that infuses oil or ghee with spices and aromatics to create a flavorful base for many dishes. Have a small ladle or pan handy, and keep a little "tadka station" with whole cumin seeds, mustard seeds, curry leaves, and dried red chilis close by. It's a simple step that brings a whole new depth to your cooking.

Make Extra to Save Time

Recipes like dal, curries, and rice dishes freeze beautifully, so why not make a double batch? You'll have a comforting meal ready for any night when you want something homemade without the fuss.

Equip Yourself with the Right Tools

A few quality pieces of cookware can make all the difference. A heavy-bottomed pan, cast iron skillet or Dutch oven is ideal for curries, while a wide pan with a lid is great for cooking rice without sticking. A spice grinder (or a small coffee grinder) works wonders for fresh spices, which makes a big impact on the flavor of each dish.

Cooking Tips for Indian Cuisine

No Need to Peel Cardamom: You don't have to peel cardamom when adding it to infuse flavor in oil or ghee.

Ginger with Skin On: Ginger can be used with the skin on for added flavor and nutrients.

Curry Powder vs. Garam Masala: Curry powder is not traditionally used in Indian cuisine. Garam masala is the closest equivalent.

Use Kitchen Tools as Needed: Don't worry about using tools like a microplane for mincing or a spice grinder instead of a mortar and pestle.

Go Easy on the Water for Yogurt-Based Sauces: Indian curries with yogurt bases can split if there's too much liquid. Use thick yogurt and add it slowly over low heat to keep the sauce creamy.

Use Fresh Spices When Possible: Spices lose their potency over time. Buy whole spices and toast or grind them fresh for the best flavor.

Salt to Taste at the End: Salt levels can vary with ingredients. Add a little initially, but make final adjustments at the end for balance.

Balance Heat with Dairy or Coconut Milk: If a dish is spicier than expected, add yogurt, cream, or coconut milk to mellow the heat.

Don't Shy Away from Frozen Ingredients: Frozen vegetables like peas, spinach, and grated coconut can save time without compromising taste.

Let the Oil Do Its Work: When frying spices or aromatics, give them time to bloom. This step, , deepens the flavor.

Experiment with Acid for Flavor Balance: A bit of lime or lemon can brighten flavors, especially in rich dishes.

Leftovers Often Taste Better: Many Indian dishes develop deeper flavors as they sit, so curries and dals are often tastier the next day.

Adjust Spice Levels Slowly: Start with a smaller amount of cayenne or serrano peppers and adjust after tasting to find your perfect spice level.

Taste as You Cook: Adjust flavors as you go. Tasting at different stages helps ensure your dish is heading in the right direction.

Marinate for More Flavor: Marinating proteins and vegetables can enhance flavor significantly. Use spices, yogurt, or acidic ingredients for best results.

Layer Flavors: Build flavors in layers by starting with aromatics, then adding spices and proteins in stages.

Use a Heavy-Bottomed Pot: This helps distribute heat evenly, preventing burning when simmering sauces or cooking lentils.

Cook with Seasonality in Mind: Use fresh, seasonal ingredients for the best flavor and nutrition.

Don't Overcook Greens: Leafy greens should be sautéed just until wilted to maintain their color and nutrients.

Use Ghee for Authentic Flavor: If possible, cook with ghee (clarified butter) for a rich, nutty flavor that enhances many dishes.

A close-up photograph of skewers with grilled meat and vegetables, likely kebab, with glowing hot coals in the background. The image is framed by a white border.

APPETIZERS

Tandoori Chicken



Ingredients

- Chicken Drumsticks – 3 lbs.
- Whole fat Yogurt – 1 cup
- Cayenne – 1 tsp
- Minced Ginger – 1 T
- Minced Garlic – 1 T
- Paprika – 2 tsp
- Fenugreek leaves – 2 tsp, crushed
- Ground Coriander – 2 tsp
- Freshly crushed black pepper – 1 tsp
- Ground Cardamom – 1 tsp
- Ground Cloves – ½ tsp
- Ground Cinnamon – ½ tsp
- Salt- 2 tsp
- Lemon juice – 1 T
- Beet Powder or red food coloring – 1 tsp (optional)
- Butter – 1 T
- Lemon wedges & cilantro

Instructions

- Whisk spices with yogurt, lemon juice and salt. It is important that you use thick yogurt for this recipe. Taste the marinade and adjust to your taste. It should taste slightly salty
- Cut deep slashes into chicken (about 2-3 cuts) and coat well, make sure you rub the marinade between the gashes as well and marinate for anywhere from 4 hours to overnight covered in the refrigerator.
- Preheat oven to 400 degrees
- Line a baking sheet with foil and place a wire rack over the sheet. Spray cooking oil on the wire rack and place chicken on the wire rack
- Bake for 20 minutes, then flip and bake for 15 minutes. Heat broiler and broil for an additional minute. Using a meat thermometer, check that the internal temperature is 165 degrees
- Using a pastry brush, brush butter over the tandoori chicken and serve warm

This dish is typically made in a tandoor oven that goes up to 900, which results in silky smooth texture. Add a dash of liquid smoke to emulate it

Chicken Tikka



Ingredients

- Coriander seeds – 1 tsp
- Cumin seeds – 1 tsp
- Garam Masala – 2 tsp
- Turmeric – 1 tsp
- Garlic – 1 T, finely minced
- Ginger – 1 T, finely minced
- Plain Yogurt – $\frac{3}{4}$ cup
- Salt – 2 tsp or to taste
- Boneless Chicken thighs – 1 lb.

Instructions

- Heat a small skillet and dry roast coriander seeds and cumin seeds separately. Sauté until it slightly changes color and there is a nice aroma wafting in the kitchen
- Transfer to a spice grinder and grind to a smooth powder or you can use a mortar and pestle
- Add all ingredients to a bowl and marinate the chicken for 30 minutes to overnight, depending on the time you have
- Preheat oven to 375 and bake for 15-18 minutes and broil for a few minutes until it changes color. Check with meat thermometer that the internal temperature is 165
- Serve warm with lemon or lime wedges, cumin rice and mint chutney

Sweet and Spicy Masala Chicken Wings



Ingredients

For the marinade

- Chicken wings – 2 pounds
- Minced Ginger – 1 T
- Minced garlic – 1 T
- Soy sauce – 2 T
- Ground Coriander – 1 tsp

Instructions

- Combine soy sauce, ginger, garlic and coriander in a large bowl. Add Chicken and toss well to combine
- This can be marinated for 30 minutes to about 6 hours
- Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a large baking sheet with aluminum foil or parchment paper
- Place a wire rack over it and place wings in a single layer
- Bake in preheated oven for 20 to 25 minutes, until cooked through
- Baste the chicken with left over marinade once during the baking process

For Sauce

- Neutral oil – 1 tsp
- Garlic Cloves – 12, thinly sliced
- Serrano Pepper – 2, julienned (with or without seeds)
- Garam Masala – ½ tsp
- Paprika – 1 tsp
- Soy sauce – 2 tsp
- Sambal Olek – 1 T
- Ketchup – 1 T
- Brown Sugar – 1 T
- Pineapple Juice – ½ cup
- Corn Starch – 1 tsp
- Scallion – 1, finely chopped
- Cilantro – 1 tsp, finely chopped

Instructions

- Heat oil in a sauté pan on medium low heat.
- Add sliced garlic and sauté until fragrant and slightly changes color. Do this patiently on low heat, or garlic browns quickly and turns bitter.
- Stir in julienned serrano pepper and cook for 30 to 45 seconds
- Add garam masala, paprika, soy sauce, sambal olek, ketchup and brown sugar.
- In a small bowl, whisk together pineapple juice with cornstarch, until smooth. Add it to the pan while whisking continuously. Once the sauce thickens, turn off the heat. Check for seasonings and adjust to your taste.
- Add chopped scallions and chicken and toss well to coat.
- Serve immediately, sprinkled with chopped cilantro.

Vegetable Cutlets



Ingredients

- Mashed potatoes – 1 cup (boiled and mashed)
- Red onion – ½ cup, finely chopped
- Carrots – ½ cup, finely chopped
- Peas – ¼ cup (blanched)
- Green beans – ¼ cup, finely chopped
- Ginger – ¼ tsp, minced
- Garlic – ½ tsp, minced
- Oil – 3 tbsp (divided)
- Garam masala – ¼ tsp
- Cayenne powder – ¼ tsp
- Turmeric powder – ½ tsp
- Salt – ½ tsp (or to taste)
- All-purpose flour – ⅓ cup
- Water – ½ cup
- Breadcrumbs – ½ cup
- Cilantro – 2 tbsp, finely chopped (optional for garnish)

Instructions

- Prep the potatoes: Boil and mash the potatoes until smooth. Set aside.
- Blanch peas: Blanch the peas in boiling water for 1-2 minutes until tender. Drain and set aside.
- Sauté vegetables: Heat 1 tbsp of oil in a nonstick pan over medium heat.
- Add the minced ginger and garlic, sauté for 30 seconds until fragrant.
- Add the finely chopped onions and cook until translucent (about 2-3 minutes).
- Stir in salt, cayenne, turmeric, and garam masala. Cook for another 30 seconds.
- Add the carrots, green beans, and blanched peas. Sauté for 2 minutes, until slightly softened.
- Turn off the heat and let the vegetables cool slightly.
- Mix vegetables and potatoes: Combine the mashed potatoes with the sautéed vegetables. Mix thoroughly until everything is well combined.
- Shape patties: Once the mixture has cooled enough to handle, divide it into equal portions (about 2 tbsp each). Shape into round patties and flatten slightly.
- Prepare batter: In a small bowl, whisk the all-purpose flour with water until smooth and resembles a thin crepe batter.
- Coat patties: Dip each patty into the flour mixture, shaking off excess.
- Dredge the patties in breadcrumbs, ensuring an even coating.
- Fry the patties: Heat 2 tbsp of oil in a nonstick pan or cast-iron skillet over medium heat.
- Fry the patties in batches for 2-3 minutes per side, or until golden brown and crispy.
- Serve hot with chutney or ketchup.
- Tips: For extra crunch, you can use panko breadcrumbs instead of regular breadcrumbs.

Make a large batch to freeze for later. Serve this as a vegetarian burger with a side of pickled onions, mango chutney, lettuce and tomatoes.

Onion Pakoda



Ingredients

- Red Onion - 1 large, very thinly sliced
- Salt - 1/2 tsp, to sprinkle on onions
- Curry leaves – 10-12 leaves (optional)
- Garbanzo flour – 1 cup
- Rice flour – 3/4 cup
- Cayenne – 1/8th tsp or more to taste
- Asafetida – less than 1/8th tsp
- Baking powder - 1/2 tsp
- Oil – 1 T for mixing the batter + more for deep frying
- Water – 1/2 cup approx.
- Salt to taste

Instructions

- Slice onions very thinly and sprinkle salt over it and set aside for 15 minutes.
- Gently squeeze the water out of the onions and transfer to a large mixing bowl.
- Add curry leaves to the onions.
- In a separate bowl, mix garbanzo flour, rice flour, cayenne, asafetida and baking powder
- After you mix it thoroughly, add oil and rub between the palms of your hands.
- Now transfer this mixture to the onions and you will notice that you have sufficient moisture.
- Add some salt and mix well with your hands. Expect your hands to get very sticky. You are looking for a consistency where it can gently drop in the oil. Adjust by adding flour or water to get the right consistency.
- You should have started heating the oil once the mixing begins.
- Use a fork to scoop some batter, then gently drop it into the oil using a spoon. Fry the pakodas until golden brown.
- Taste the pakoda for seasonings and adjust to your taste. These pakodas are crisp until the next day. You don't have to serve with a dipping sauce or chutney.

The background of the image is a dense, colorful collage of various vegetables and lentils. On the left side, there are bright yellow corn kernels. In the top-left and bottom-left areas, there are vibrant green peas. To the right of the peas and corn, there are large, smooth, light-brown beans. On the far right side, there are small, round, orange-red lentils. In the center of the image, there is a white rectangular box with a thin black border. Inside this box, the text "VEGETABLES & LENTILS" is written in a bold, brown, sans-serif font. The word "VEGETABLES" is on the top line, "&" is in the middle, and "LENTILS" is on the bottom line. There are also some faint, light-blue decorative icons scattered around the text, including a sun-like shape, a leaf, and some abstract geometric shapes.

VEGETABLES & LENTILS

Palak Paneer



Ingredients

- Spinach – 8 cups, packed
- Ginger – 1 tsp, minced
- Garlic – 4 pods, minced
- Thai bird chilies or serrano pepper -1, slit in half & scoop the seeds
- Neutral Oil – 1 T
- Ghee – 2 T + 1 T
- Dried Bay leaf – 1
- Cumin Seeds – 1 tsp + 1 tsp
- Finely chopped Onion – 1 cup
- Turmeric – ½ tsp
- Cayenne – ½ tsp
- Dried fenugreek leaves – ½ tsp, crushed
- Ground Coriander – 2 tsp
- Tomato – 1, large, roughly chopped
- Salt – to taste
- Water – ½ cup
- Cream – 2 T + 2 T
- Ground Nutmeg – 1/8th tsp
- Paneer – 7 oz. cubed
- Whole dried red pepper – 1

Instructions

- Wash the greens in running water a few times and set aside
- Heat a large pot with water and when it comes to a boil, switch off the stove and add spinach
- Let it sit for a minute or two and transfer greens to a bowl
- Set aside two cups of the hot water and add paneer to it. This helps soften the paneer. Let it sit for 10 minutes and then strain the water and cut Paneer in cubes
- Grind greens to a smooth consistency using a blender
- Using a mortar & pestle, coarsely grind garlic, ginger and serrano pepper together and set aside
- In pan heat ghee and oil, add bay leaf and cumin seeds and sauté for 30 seconds followed by ginger, garlic and serrano pepper paste. You are looking for the garlic mixture to brown lightly
- Add onions and cook until lightly browned.
- Add ground spices, season with salt and mix well to combine. Add tomatoes and cook until softened
- Add pureed spinach, water and stir continuously for a minute on high heat
- Add cream and fold it in gently. Add nutmeg and mix well. Check for seasonings and adjust to your taste
- Add paneer and gently fold it in the curry
- Heat ghee in a small saute pan, when it melts add red pepper and cumin seeds. When they slightly change color, drizzle over the curry. Spoon cream over the curry and serve with rice or roti

Black Eyed Peas Curry



Ingredients

- Oil - 2 T
- Cumin seeds - 1/2 tsp
- White onion - 2 cups, finely chopped
- Bay Leaf - 1
- Garlic - 3 cloves, minced
- Ginger - 1 tsp, minced
- Turmeric - 1/2 tsp
- Cayenne - 1/4 tsp
- Tomato - 1 cup, diced
- Garam masala - 1/2 tsp
- Black eyed peas - 2, 15 oz cans rinsed & drained
- Water - 1 cup
- Salt to taste
- Lemon Juice - 1 tsp
- Cilantro - for garnish

Instructions

- Heat the oil in a pan over medium-high heat.
- Add bay leaf and cumin seeds and sauté for 30 seconds.
- Add onion and cook, stirring frequently, until the onions turn golden brown
- Add the garlic, ginger, turmeric, and cayenne and cook, stirring frequently, until the mixture is very fragrant, about 1-2 minutes.
- Reduce heat to medium, add the tomato and any accumulated juices to the saucepan and cook until the tomato begins to break down. Add the black-eyed peas, water, salt and stir to mix.
- Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for about 12-15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- Add the lemon juice and cilantro leaves, stir, and cook for another minute. Taste and adjust salt if necessary.
- Serve warm with rice or rotis

Channa Masala



Ingredients

- Neutral Oil - 1 T
- Bay Leaf -1
- Cumin seeds - 1 tsp
- Red Onion – ½ cup chopped finely
- Ginger – 1 tsp, minced
- Tomato – 1 cup, finely chopped
- Salt - to taste
- Ground Turmeric – 1 tsp
- Garam Masala – 1T
- Ground Coriander - 1 tsp
- Cayenne – ¼ tsp
- Garbanzo Beans – 2 cans drained and rinsed
- Tamarind paste – 1 tsp diluted in ¼ cup water or lemon juice – 1T
- Brown sugar – 1 tsp
- Cilantro – 1 T for garnish

Instructions

- Heat oil in a pan, when the oil shimmers, it is an indication that it is hot, add bay leaf and cumin seeds and once they start browning, add the onion, and ginger
- Sauté for a few minutes until onions turn translucent
- Now add the chopped tomato, salt, ground turmeric, garam masala, coriander and cayenne
- Sauté for about 3-5 minutes on medium low heat, or until tomatoes lose its shape.
- Sprinkle some water if it sticks to the pan. Add garbanzo beans, tamarind, brown sugar and half a cup of water (use another ¼ cup if you use lemon juice)
- Using a potato masher, slightly mash the curry for added texture. You can use a blender too
- Cover the pan with a lid and let it cook for about 15 to 20 minutes on medium low
- Garnish with cilantro and serve warm with rice or roti

Channa masala tastes great with toast the next day. You can also top it over vegetable cutlets and serve with store bought tamarind and mint chutney

Dal Tadka



Ingredients

- Red lentils or yellow mung beans - 1 cup, rinsed and soak in water for 30 minutes
- Oil or ghee- 1 T
- Cumin seeds - 1 tsp
- Serrano pepper- 1, seeds removed, julienne
- Garlic - 1 T, minced
- Asafetida- 1/8th tsp (optional)
- Turmeric - 1 tsp
- Tomato - 2 cups, finely chopped
- Salt to taste
- Water - 4 cups
- Cilantro - 1 T, finely chopped
- Lemon Juice - 1 tsp

Instructions

- Heat a Dutch oven with ghee and when the ghee melts and is smoking, start with cumin seeds, give it a quick stir and add serrano pepper, asafetida and turmeric
- Cook this for 30 seconds and then add tomatoes, followed by a sprinkling of salt
- Close with a lid and let it cook on medium low heat for 3-4 minutes. You are looking for the tomatoes to lose its shape
- Add lentils and 4 cups of water. Close with a lid and cook for 15-30 minutes
- Stir in lemon and check for seasoning and adjust to taste
- You can add more water if you like the dal to be the consistency of soup
- Garnish with cilantro and serve with rice

Aloo Gobi

Potato & Cauliflower Curry



Ingredients

- Ground Coriander – 2 tsp
- Ground Turmeric – ¼ tsp
- Cayenne – ¼ tsp
- Garam Masala – ¼ tsp
- Cooking Oil – 3 T
- Cumin seeds - 1/2 tsp
- Bay leaves - 2
- Hing/Asafetida – 1/8th tsp (optional)
- Medium Dice Onions – 1 cup
- Minced Ginger – ½ tsp
- Tomato paste – 1 tsp or 1 small chopped tomato
- Salt – 1.5 tsp or to taste
- Potato - 2 medium sized yukon potatoes cut in to 8
- Cauliflower- 2 cups (you can use the soft stem as well)
- Lemon Juice – 1 tsp
- Cilantro – ¼ cup, finely chopped

Instructions

- In a small bowl, mix coriander, garam masala, turmeric, cayenne and some water to make it a paste.
- Heat oil in a pan; when the oil shimmers, you can start adding cumin seeds, bay leaf and asafetida
- Add onions and cook until they are translucent, add ginger and mix well.
- Add tomato paste or tomatoes. If using paste, sprinkle a few teaspoons of water and cook for a few seconds
- Now add the spice paste and salt to season. This prevents the spices from burning. · Next, add potatoes, stir well. Close with a lid and cook for 8 to 10 minutes. Add the cauliflower and cook for an additional 5 minutes with the lid closed
- Take off the lid, check for seasoning and adjust to taste and make sure potatoes are fork tender or cook for a little longer. At this point you can either be done or cook on medium low heat to roast the potatoes and cauliflower.
- After they are completely cooked, add lemon juice and cilantro. Gently mix and remove from the stove. Serve with rice or roti



MEAT DISHES

Butter Chicken



Ingredients

- Marinade
- Yogurt – 1/4 cup
- Cayenne – 1 tsp
- Ginger – 1 tsp minced
- Garlic – 1 tsp minced
- Boneless Chicken thighs– 2 lbs (Cut into bite sized pieces)
- Safflower Oil – 1 T
- Butter – 4 T
- Cinnamon – 1/2 inch stick
- Cloves – 2
- Cardamom – 3 whole
- Onion- 2 cups, roughly chopped
- Coriander seeds – 3/4 tsp, roast and grind
- Cumin seeds– 3/4 tsp, roast and grind
- Cayenne – 1/2 tsp
- Ground black pepper – 1/2 tsp
- Diced Tomatoes – 1.5 cups
- Unsalted cashew nuts – 1/2 cup
- Cilantro chopped – 1 T
- Salt to taste

Instructions

- In a large mixing bowl add yogurt cayenne, salt, ginger and garlic. Let the chicken marinate in it for about 20 minutes or even overnight
- In a heated skillet, add the oil and butter.
- Stir in whole spices one by one starting with cinnamon, cloves and cardamom. Sauté for 30 seconds and then add the onions and cook till translucent.
- Add all the spice powders, tomatoes and cook for 5 minutes to 7 minutes. You are looking for the tomatoes to lose shape and oil separates.
- Transfer to a blender and grind to a smooth paste along with cashew nuts.
- In the same skillet, add chicken and pour sauce over and cook on medium low heat for 7-10 minutes or until cooked through.
- Garnish with cilantro and serve warm with naan or rice

This has to be one of the most popular dishes I teach. Make a double batch of the sauce to make a vegetarian dish for your guests. Simply cube some paneer and add to the 2nd batch of sauce and simmer

Chicken Vindaloo



Ingredients

- White Onions - 3 cups, roughly chopped
- Cooking Oil - 1 T
- Tomato paste - 3 T or 3 large tomatoes
- Brown/Black Mustard Seeds - 1 tsp
- Dried red chilies - 4 to 8 (depending on how spicy you want it)
- Cumin seeds - 2 tsp
- Black Peppercorns - 1 tsp
- Garlic - 6 to 8 cloves
- Ginger - 1 inch piece
- Distilled white Vinegar - ½ cup
- Curry leaves - 8-10 leaves (optional)
- Ground Turmeric - ½ tsp
- Bone in or boneless Chicken Thighs - 1 Lb, chopped into bite sized pieces
- Salt to taste

Instructions

- Heat oil in a heavy bottomed pan and sauté onions until golden brown and set aside. If using fresh tomatoes, add to the onions after it browns and cook until it loses its shape
- In a blender grind onions, along with rest of the ingredients except the chicken
- In the same pan place the chicken and pour the ground mixture over chicken, add salt to taste.
- Cook chicken on medium low heat covered and simmer until chicken is cooked completely. You can add water and adjust depending on how thick or thin you want the curry
- Serve over rice or roti
- Always plan on serving vindaloo the next day. The flavors settle in and taste better a day after it is cooked.

Vindaloo is considered an Indian curry, but in reality a Goan adaptation of the Portuguese dish "carne de vinho e albos" or meat cooked in vinegar and garlic. Use pork in lieu of chicken if you prefer

Kerala Shrimp Curry



Ingredients

- Shrimp - 1lbs medium/large size (preferably deveined and tail removed)
- Freshly ground black pepper – 1 tsp
- Ground Turmeric – 1 tsp
- Ground Coriander – 2 T
- Garam Masala – 1 tsp
- Paprika – 1 T
- Cayenne – ½ tsp
- Coconut oil – 3T
- Red onion – 1 Large, thinly sliced
- Garlic – 5 cloves, sliced
- Minced Ginger – 1 tsp
- Serrano pepper – 1, sliced thinly, (seeds removed)
- Curry leaves – 1 spring
- Salt to taste
- Cilantro – ¼ cup, finely chopped
- Lemon juice – 1 tsp

Instructions

- Wash and clean the shrimp
- Combine shrimp with black pepper, turmeric, coriander powder, garam masala powder, paprika and cayenne and set aside for 20 minutes.
- Heat coconut oil in a pan and add onions, garlic and ginger. Cook until onions are slightly golden brown.
- Add Serrano pepper and sauté for 30 seconds followed by the marinated shrimp and curry leaves. Season with salt
- Cover and cook over medium low heat, stirring occasionally to keep it from sticking or burning for 6 to 8 minutes
- Transfer to a serving, garnish with cilantro and a drizzle of lemon juice

Salmon Curry in coconut milk



Ingredients

- Serves 4 to 6
- Coconut oil - 3 T
- Mustard seeds – 1 tsp
- Ginger - 1 inch, julienne
- Curry leaves – 10 to 12 leaves
- Pearl onions - 1 cup, peel and cut in 4's
- Serrano pepper – 3, split in half
- Dried red pepper – 1, broken in half (optional)
- Cayenne – ½ tsp or more to taste
- Ground Turmeric – ½ tsp
- Ground Coriander – 1 tsp
- Tamarind paste – 1 tsp
- Water – 1 cup
- Salmon – 4, 6 oz fillets
- Coconut milk – ½ cup

Instructions

- Heat coconut oil in a sauté pan, and when it is hot, start with mustard seeds and when it begins to pop, add curry leaves, ginger and cook for 30 to 45 seconds.
- Add pearl onions and cook until they turn translucent
- Add dried red pepper and Serrano peppers, ground spices, salt and stir well.
- Dilute tamarind paste in a cup of water and allow it to simmer for 5 to 10 minutes (this is to cook the tamarind water or it will end up tasting like raw tamarind)
- Gently slide salmon fillets and cook based on the cut of the salmon. For 6 oz fillets, cook for 5 minutes on medium low heat
- Add coconut milk, switch of the stove and close with a lid
- Let the curry sit for 15 to 20 minutes before you serve
- Garnish with fresh curry leaves if you have some.
- This curry soaks up all the flavors and tastes great the next day. Dishes like this are normally cooked in a clay pot to enhance flavors

A friend shared this recipe with our family. Use regular onions if you don't have the time to peel pearl onions. Dover sole, haddock or shrimp can be used instead of Salmon

Chicken Korma



Ingredients

- Boneless skinless chicken thighs – 1.5 lbs., chopped into 1 inch piece
- Ground turmeric – ¼ tsp
- Yogurt – 3 T
- Minced ginger – 1.5 tsp
- Minced garlic – 1.5 tsp
- Garam masala – ¾ tsp
- Paprika – 1 tsp
- Salt – 1 tsp

To Sauté and blend

- Oil – 1.5 tsp
- Butter – 1.5 tsp
- Green Cardamom - 2
- Red Onion – 1 cup, roughly chopped
- Yogurt – ¼ cup
- Almonds - 10

Final Touches

- Oil -1 T
- Butter – 1T
- Cloves – 4
- Cinnamon – 1 inch stick
- Cilantro – 3T, finely chopped

Instructions

- Add all ingredients under marinade except chicken and whisk well to combine. Add chicken and mix to coat chicken pieces and set aside
- Heat oil and butter in a sauté pan, add cardamom and red onion and cook until golden brown
- When it slightly cools down, transfer to a blender along with almonds and yogurt and blend to a fine puree
- If needed, add water to help blend smoothly.
- In the same pan, heat oil and butter. Add whole spices, and marinated chicken and cook on medium low heat covered for 6 to 8 minutes
- Then add the ground mixture mix well to combine. When chicken is fully cooked, check for salt and add more if needed
- Garnish with cilantro and serve warm with rice

This recipe is very versatile, use different meats, substitute nuts if needed. If you have nut allergies, use sunflower seeds

A large, shallow wooden bowl filled with a vibrant rice dish. The rice is a mix of white and yellow, interspersed with small pieces of orange and red vegetables. Several pieces of golden-brown fried chicken are scattered throughout. A whole almond is visible on the right side, and a slice of lemon is on the left. The bowl is set against a plain white background.

RICE DISHES

How to cook rice



Ingredients

- Rice– 1 cup,
- Water – 6 to 8 cups

Instructions

- Rinse rice under cold running water by placing rice in a fine mesh strainer
- Heat water in a large pot. When the water starts boiling, add rice and cook for 8 to 10 minutes
- We don't need to close with a lid
- Check if the rice is cooked to the consistency you like
- Strain rice and serve. Any kind of long grain rice will work including basmati Brown rice cooked this way, will take roughly 20 minutes

Making rice seems like the simplest thing to do, but things can go wrong. In south India, for centuries this was how rice has been cooked. Rice is cooked like you cook pasta, follow the same rules (please don't rinse the cooked rice under running water). After rice is cooked, rice is strained and the starch is reserved for other uses. Cooking rice this way results in light fluffy rice.

Vegetable Biryani



Ingredients

- Oil – 3 T
- Dried Bay leaf – 2
- Red Onion – 1 large, thinly sliced
- Ginger – 2 tsp, minced
- Garlic – 2 tsp, minced
- Serrano pepper – 2, minced
- Tomato – 2 cups, chopped
- Green Beans – 1 cup, chopped 1 inch
- Carrot – 1 cup, chopped
- Peas – 1 cup
- Beets – ¼ cup, chopped
- Basmati Rice – 2 cups, rinsed and soaked for 30 minutes
- Cilantro -1/4 cup, finely chopped
- Mint – ¼ cup, finely chopped
- Coconut milk – 1 cup
- water – 2 cups
- Salt to taste
- Butter or ghee – 2 T (optional)
- Saffron – ¼ tsp (optional)

Biryani Powder

- Cloves – 2
- Green Cardamom – 3
- Star Anise – 1
- Cinnamon – 1 inch stick

Instructions

- Grind the above to as fine a powder as possible using a spice grinder, blender or mortar and pestle
- Rinse rice and soak in water for 30 minutes. Strain all the water and let it sit in the colander
- Heat a Dutch oven or a heavy bottomed pan with a lid with oil. When the oil shimmers, it is an indication that the oil is ready
- Add biriyani powder and sauté well on medium low heat. Add bay leaf and onions and sauté until onions are translucent. Stir in minced ginger, garlic and serrano peppers and mix well to combine and cook for roughly 30 – 45 seconds
- Add tomatoes and cook until they are cooked well and almost lose it shape

Kitchari/Kichadi



Ingredients

- Ghee – 1 T or Oil
- Cardamom – 2
- Dried Bay leaf – 1
- Cloves - 1
- Cumin seeds – 1 tsp
- Minced Ginger – 1 tsp
- Yellow Mung Beans – ½ cup
- Basmati Rice – 1 cup
- Ground Turmeric – 1 tsp
- Salt to taste
- Ground black pepper – 1 tsp
- Water – 4 to 5 cups

Instructions

- Rinse the mung dal beans and strain them five times, or until the water runs clear.
- Heat the ghee or oil in a large pot. Add whole spices, cumin seeds and ginger and sauté for 30 seconds
- Stir in the rice, beans and mix well to coat the rice with oil
- Add water, ground turmeric, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and close with a lid
- Cook for roughly 45 minutes or longer until the beans and rice are soft. You are looking for a porridge like consistency
- Serve warm with yogurt and or pappadum

Kitchari is a simple, comforting dish with ancient roots in India. Traditionally made by cooking rice and lentils together with spices, it's considered a nourishing and easily digestible meal, often eaten during cleansing or when someone is unwell. Kitchari is highly adaptable, allowing you to modify the recipe to suit your taste and dietary needs while maintaining its wholesome essence.

Coconut Rice



Ingredients

- Cooked basmati rice – 3 cups
- Coconut Oil – 3 tsp
- Split Chick Peas – 2 T
- Mustard seeds – 1 tsp (optional)
- Cashew nuts – 4 to 5 whole (broken in half)
- Shredded unsweetened coconut – 1 cup
- Curry leaves – 6 to 8 leaves (optional)
- Asafetida – 1/8th tsp (optional)
- Whole dried red Chilli pepper – 1

Instructions

- Cook basmati rice ahead of time and spread on a baking sheet to cool
- Heat oil in a pan, when the oil shimmers it is an indication that oil is heated. Add split chick peas and sauté until it slightly changes color and set aside
- In the remaining oil add mustard seeds, curry leaves, asafetida, and dried red chili and roast till the mustard seeds pop. Pour the seasoning over the rice along with chick peas
- In the same pan with the stove switched off, roast the coconut until it slightly changes color. The heat from the pan is sufficient (If you are using frozen grated coconut switch on the stove and keep the temperature to medium low.
- Add this to the rice, season with salt and fold it gently, so the flavors blend in. Check for seasonings and adjust to taste.
- Serve at room temperature

Turmeric Rice



Ingredients

- Basmati Rice – 1 cup
- Oil – 1 T
- Mustard Seeds – ½ tsp
- Cumin seeds – ½ tsp
- Serrano pepper – 1, slit in half
- Diced Onion – 1 Cup, Medium dice
- Ground Turmeric – 1 tsp
- Lemon Juice – 2 tsp
- Sugar – ½ tsp
- Salt – to taste
- Finely Chopped Cilantro – ¼ cup

Instructions

- Heat oil in a large pan/wok over high heat. When the oil shimmers, it is an indication that the oil is heated
- Add mustard seeds and let it pop followed cumin seeds. When cumin slightly changes color, add Serrano pepper and diced onion
- Stir fry the onions until they are slightly brown around the edges
- Add turmeric, lemon juice, sugar and salt and switch off the stove
- Add rice and fold well until mixed thoroughly. Return it to the stove and cook on low heat for five minutes
- Garnish with cilantro and serve

To make this a wholesome dish, add 2 cups of vegetables like carrots and peas. I like to add finely chopped mint for added flavor.



DESSERTS

Shrikand



Ingredients

- Plain Greek Yogurt – 3 cups (full Fat)
- Sugar – ¼ cup
- Whole Cardamom – 3 pods or 1/4 tsp ground
- Nutmeg- 1/8th tsp
- Saffron – 3 to 4 strands (optional)
- Pistachios – 1 T, finely chopped (Optional)

Instructions

- Tie yogurt in a cheese cloth and hang to drain all the whey. This is preferably done over the sink. This yields thick yogurt free of whey.
- Using a mortar and pestle, grind the cardamom to a fine powder after removing the thick green covering
- Crush saffron strands placing them on your palm and using your thumb to crush them. This helps release all the flavors.
- Whisk the yogurt until it is fluffy and smooth in texture.
- Combine sugar, cardamom and saffron and taste. You can add more sugar if you like it sweeter · Refrigerate until you are ready to serve
- Garnish with chopped pistachios

Coconut Burfi



Ingredients

- Shredded Coconut (Unsweetened) – 2 cups
- Sugar – 1.5 cups
- Water – $\frac{1}{4}$ cup
- Ground Cardamom – $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp
- Coconut Oil - 1 T (to coat the plate)

Instructions

- Grease a plate or tray with oil
- In a heavy bottomed pan, add water, sugar and cardamom. Boil till it reaches a one string consistency (220-222 °F). Alternatively, dip a spatula in the syrup and lift out. Allow to cool for a few seconds as it will be very hot at first. Now touch the syrup with a clean forefinger and then touch your thumb and forefinger together and pull apart gently. One-thread consistency is when a single thread is formed (and does not break) when your forefinger and your thumb are pulled apart.
- Add coconut and mix well, cook on medium heat until water has completely evaporated and the mixture starts to come together and leaves the sides of the pan
- Pour the contents onto a plate that has been greased with oil and allow it cool
- Cut the burfi into small squares and store in the refrigerator for roughly 2 weeks

Mango Lassi



Ingredients

- Mango Pulp – 2 cups (About 2 mangoes peeled & chopped)
- Whole fat Plain Yogurt – 2 cups
- Milk – 1 cup
- Sugar – 1 to 2 T (depending on how sweet mango is)
- Ground Cardamom – ½ tsp
- Saffron - a few strands for garnish (optional)

Instructions

- Place all the ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth
- You can thin the lassi down by either adding cold milk or water
- Mango lassi is a great accompaniment with Indian food or just a summer time drink.
- Vegans can use cashew milk and cashew yogurt instead of dairy

Streets are lined with lassi shops especially during the summer months in India. The most popular ones are salted and plain sweet lassi with no added fruit.

Rice Kheer



Ingredients

- Basmati Rice – ¼ cup
- Ghee – 1 T
- Milk – 4.5 cups
- Cardamom – 1 tsp
- Sugar – ½ cup
- Saffron – 4-5 strands
- Unsalted pistachios – 1 T, chopped

Instructions

- Rinse the basmati rice thoroughly in cold water. Drain and pulse it a few times in a food processor or blender, breaking it down into coarse bits (but not a fine powder).
- Soak the saffron strands in 1-2 tbsp of warm milk and set aside.
- Heat the ghee in a heavy-bottomed pan over medium heat.
- Add the pulsed rice and sauté for 2-3 minutes until the rice becomes aromatic and lightly golden.
- Slowly pour in the milk, stirring continuously. Bring the mixture to a gentle boil, then lower the heat and let it simmer.
- Simmer the rice in the milk for 25-30 minutes, stirring frequently to prevent sticking. The rice should become soft, and the mixture will begin to thicken.
- Once the kheer has thickened, add the sugar, cardamom, and the saffron-infused milk. Stir well and let it cook for another 5-7 minutes until the sugar has dissolved and the flavors meld together.
- Remove from heat, and garnish with chopped pistachios.
- Serve warm or chilled, depending on your preference.

Naankhatai



Ingredients

- 1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour (175 grams)
- 2 tablespoons fine semolina (25 grams)
- ½ cup powdered sugar (80 grams)
- ½ cup ghee (115 grams)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1/8th teaspoon saffron
- 2 teaspoons slivered pistachios or nuts of your choice

Instructions

- **Prepare the Flour:** In a bowl, sift the all-purpose flour and set it aside.
- **Cream Ghee and Sugar:** In a separate bowl, whisk together ghee and powdered sugar until the mixture is creamy, light, and pale in color.
- **Combine Dry Ingredients:** Add the all-purpose flour, semolina, salt, saffron and ground cardamom to the ghee-sugar mixture. Mix everything with a spatula, then use your hands to gently bring the dough together without kneading. If the dough appears dry, add a teaspoon of ghee and gently work it until it forms a cohesive mass.
- **Shape the Cookies:** Roll a tablespoon portion of the dough and roll it into a smooth ball between your palms. Slightly flatten each ball and place it on a baking tray lined with parchment paper. Ensure the cookies are spaced about 1 inch apart, as they expand while baking.
- **Decorate:** Use a knife to create a crisscross pattern on top of each cookie, or make a small indentation in the center if preferred. Sprinkle slivered pistachios in the center of the cooking. Refrigerate the tray until the oven preheats.
- **Preheat the Oven:** Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C).
- **Bake:** Place the tray in the preheated oven and bake for 15 to 16 minutes. The cookies will be soft in the center but will firm up as they cool.
- **Cool:** Allow the cookies to cool on the tray for at least 15 minutes. Then, carefully transfer them to a wire rack using a spatula to cool them completely before storing them.
- **Serve:** Enjoy with a cup of chai & pakora



OTHERS

Raitha



Ingredients

- Yogurt – 1 cup, whisked
- Water – ½ cup
- Salt – ½ tsp
- Ground Pepper – ½ tsp
- English Cucumber – 1, grated or chopped

Instructions

- In a large bowl, whisk yogurt and water together to combine
- Season with salt and pepper
- Stir in grated or chopped cucumber and fold it well
- Check for seasonings.
- You may add fresh herbs like mint or cilantro or dill when in season.

About the Author



My love affair with food began in childhood, growing up in a large, food-obsessed family where every meal was an event. Mornings started with the familiar sound of my mother's coffee filter, and from breakfast onward, the day revolved around discussing what we'd cook next. When I moved away, I missed my mother's cooking so much that I constantly called home for recipes and methods, sparking my journey into culinary exploration. Winning the Iron Chef competition at the California State Fair was a proud milestone that solidified my passion for cooking.

Since 2007, I've been sharing this passion by teaching cooking classes in Sacramento, from the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op and Whole Foods to guest lectures at American River College. In 2020, I expanded my reach by opening a virtual cooking school, offering interactive classes to students far beyond my hometown. Whether it's weekly classes, private lessons, virtual team-building events, or specialized homeschool courses, I love helping others discover the joy of cooking. Let's explore the world of flavors together, one dish at a time!