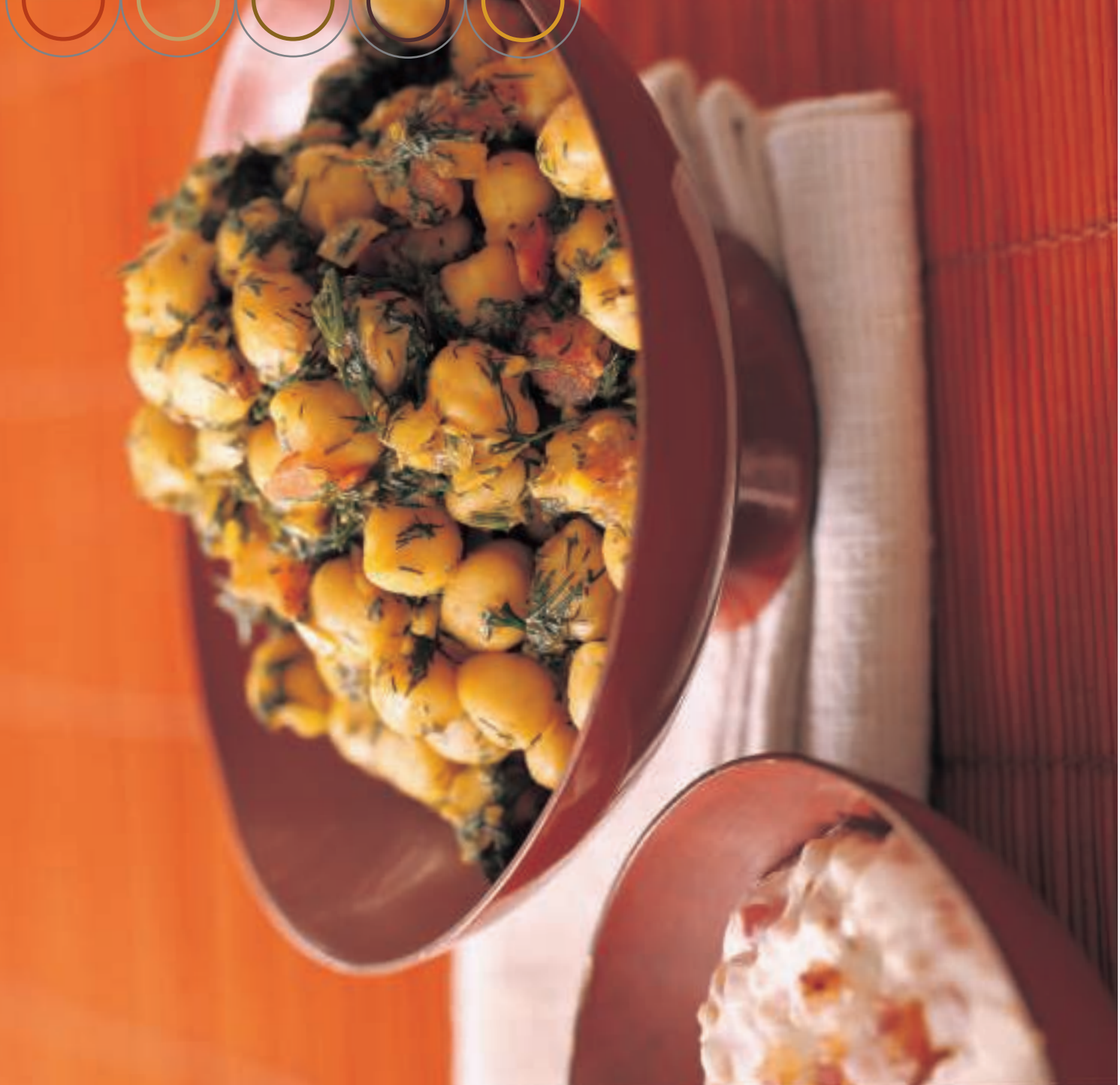


simple indian recipes
using five common spices

5 spices, 50 dishes



by ruta kahate | photographs by susie cushner





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CHRONICLE BOOKS
SAN FRANCISCO

For Ma and Tata,
my beloved parents, who introduced me to a world of excellent eating and cooking.

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Acknowledgments

It all began with my parents, Gangadhar and Priyadarshini Kahate. Passionate about food, they'd constantly experiment and improvise in the kitchen, making meal times a joy. Seeking allies, they taught me and my brother, Yashodhar, how to cook when I was eleven, encouraging us through our early kitchen disasters. Without guidance from them and constant good-natured teasing from my brother, himself an excellent cook, I'd never have inherited their love and curiosity for all things culinary.

And without my husband Neville's support, I wouldn't have taken that passion and turned it into my profession. He urged me to pursue my hobby as a career and edited my recipes ruthlessly to the point where I could write them in my sleep. He'd hold our screaming baby for hours while I was teaching a cooking class and then help do the dishes after the class.

My kind, gentle mother-in-law, Vivianne deSouza, continues to be another huge culinary influence, sharing my ability to talk about food any time of day or night. Over the years, she taught me everything she knows about Goan cuisine, generously sharing her old family recipes.

This cookbook wouldn't be a reality without my dear friend Linda Carucci and my editor, Amy Treadwell. I first met Amy while teaching a cooking class at Linda's home school and we became friends over a shared interest—our children. Everyone should be lucky enough to get as kind and patient an editor.

And finally, twenty-five recipe testers all over the country and in the United Kingdom gave freely of their time and opinions, helping me decide which recipes made the cut. They were guided in this effort by my able assistant, Erin Wakida, who held the fort admirably while I was absent for several weeks leading my annual culinary tour in India.

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

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“you eat like this every day?”

I get asked this question all the time, usually by people with busy schedules or children. It’s no use explaining that the meal was quite simple to make. “You’re a chef,” they scoff. “We’re not.” They have all these romantic notions of Indian cooking: complex sauces that take all day to cook, cupboards full of spices with unpronounceable names, secret techniques passed down from ancestors in a faraway land.

While Indian cuisine can be all of those things (my mother’s signature *goda masala* contains forty-two ingredients, for instance), very few Indians cook that way on a daily basis—they have busy schedules and children, too. But I can understand my friends’ disbelief. A weeknight meal quickly put together with a few spices can taste as if I’d slaved over it for hours.

That’s the beauty of Indian cooking. You can create dishes that taste as though you put in a lot more ingredients and effort than you really did. All you need is a tiny bit of direction. And that’s where this cookbook comes in.

My premise is simple: Using five common spices and a few easily available ingredients, you can make fifty superb, well-balanced Indian dishes. I’ve carefully chosen the spices for their aromatic properties and versatility. While the ingredients and steps are simple, you’ll find the results are anything but.

Happy cooking, and may the Kitchen Gods be with you.

my promise to you

indian food that’s not intimidating

To use this cookbook, you won’t even have to step into an Indian store. The spices and ingredients are readily available at your local supermarket or health food store. The whole point is to keep everything simple and accessible enough that you’ll be motivated to cook Indian as often as possible.

simple recipes, but not simplistic dishes

The recipes in this book don’t require special equipment or hours of prep work, yet they’ll yield some pretty spectacular dishes. My favorite party dish, Roasted Lamb with Burnt Onions (page 57), needs just two spices and a few short steps to create a flavorful, meltingly tender roast your guests will be talking about for days.

the same spices, but not the same flavors

Although you’ll be using combinations of the same spices, every dish will have a unique flavor. Steamed Cauliflower with a Spicy Tomato Sauce (page 26) and Curried Mushrooms and Peas (page 34) share the same four spices, yet each dish tastes completely different.

rule #1: no hard-and-fast rules

Although I’ve provided sample menus (page 13) and serving suggestions, you won’t need to limit yourself to these combinations. Feel free to serve non-Indian accompaniments with some of these dishes—I do, all the time. For instance, Anglo-Indian Beef Stir-Fry (page 51) goes really well with a green salad and French bread. If it feels right to you, that’s really all that matters.

five simple spices

The following spices will allow you to make dozens of balanced, complex Indian dishes. They are common enough that you'll probably find them at your local supermarket. If not, look for them at a health food store.

1. coriander seeds add a lemony, earthy flavor that's best when the seeds are freshly ground. Coriander is the seed of the cilantro herb, and is one of the world's oldest known spices; traces of it have even been found in the tomb of Tutankhamen in Egypt. Used whole, coarsely crushed, or ground, coriander is an indispensable part of Indian cooking. Since it complements other spices so well, it finds its way into many of the Indian spice blends known as *garam masalas*.

2. cumin seeds have an aromatic, peppery flavor. Part of the parsley family, cumin was an important spice to the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. It's certainly one of the most widely used spices in India, where it may have arrived via the armies of Alexander the Great. Indians cook with whole, ground, and roasted cumin. Aside from cooking, they like to chew cumin seeds after meals for digestive reasons.

3. mustard seeds are pungent, slightly bitter, and tiny. In fact, in ancient India, "one mustard seed" was the smallest weight on the scale. While mustard is used mostly as a prepared condiment in the West, Indians use the whole seeds in everything from simple dishes to complex curries, from spice blends to Indian-style pickles. Most Indian recipes use the black or brown variety, but in a pinch you can substitute the yellow kind.

4. ground cayenne adds heat, color, and a slightly smoky aroma. The cayenne pepper is one of the hotter varieties descended from *Capsicum annuum*, the original "chile" cultivated by the Aztecs thousands of years ago. Although India is the largest exporter of cayenne today, chile peppers were unknown in that country until the 1500s, when Portuguese sailors brought them from South America. In my recipes, "cayenne" refers to the red powder made from sun-dried red chile peppers of the same name. The "chili powder" sold in Indian stores can come from a variety of chiles and, as such, varies in color and level of heat.

5. ground turmeric adds a distinctive yellow hue and musky flavor that makes a lot of Indian dishes taste the way they do. Part of the ginger family, turmeric is a rhizome that has antibacterial properties, another reason Indians rub it on fish and meat—and on minor scrapes and burns. Handle turmeric powder carefully; it will transfer its signature yellow color to everything it touches, from your curries to your fingers.



one essential technique

Tadka is the basic Indian method for transferring the flavor from spices to food, and you'll use it over and over again. The name varies with the region of India—*tadka*, *bagar*, *chonkb*, *phodni*—but the technique is the same. First, the spices are added to very hot oil. The sizzling infusion or *tadka* is then used to flavor a dish. Here's how it works:

1. Heat the oil in a pan. Keep a spatter screen or lid handy—cumin and mustard seeds will sputter and pop wildly.
2. When the oil just begins to smoke, add the spice(s). Cover and allow the spice(s) to cook—this literally takes seconds. As soon as the sputtering stops, the *tadka* is ready.
3. Immediately add the larger ingredients to the pan—this cools the oil and prevents the spices from burning.

Since the oil has to be very hot, making a *tadka* takes a tiny bit of skill and speed. If you do burn the spices, don't panic. Discard them, rinse the skillet, and start over. Once you've done it a couple of times, you'll be an expert.

TIP #1: *Don't prepare a tadka in advance. Make it only when you're absolutely ready to use it, because it's most potent at the point when the spices are sizzling.*

TIP #2: *Since the tadka is ready in seconds, you won't have time to refer back to your recipe. So keep the ingredients for the next step on hand, ready to add to the pan.*

TIP #3: *A tadka may also be used to finish off a dish, by pouring it over a prepared raita or dal to impart a delicious smoky flavor. In this case, take it off the heat as soon as the spices stop sputtering and add it immediately to your dish.*



before you pick up that pan

Here are some general pointers that will help you make my recipes with predictably excellent results.

picking and using green chiles

Fresh green chiles are indispensable to Indian cooking because they add a type of heat and flavor that's different from the powdered red variety.

My recipes use fresh green serrano chile peppers, which are available at most large supermarkets. If you need a substitute, look for any thin-skinned hot green chile, like *chile de arbol*, which is sold at Mexican markets. Avoid jalapeños—their skins are too thick for most Indian preparations.

The tricky part is judging the heat of the chile. The same kind of chile from the same market will vary in heat depending on the season and on how much sun the plant received. So please adjust the amount of fresh green chiles in my recipes to suit the particular chile you're using and your own tastes. One way to get the flavor (and vitamin C) of a green chile without the heat is to simply seed it. Cut the chile lengthwise and scrape out the seeds and fibers from inside each half. If you have sensitive skin or you're not used to working with chiles, be sure to wear rubber gloves or coat your hands with oil. And don't touch your eyes until you've washed off all the chile residue with soap and water.

making ginger and garlic pastes

Lots of Indian recipes call for fresh ginger and garlic crushed into fine pastes. A mortar and pestle is traditionally used, but a fine grater achieves comparable results with minimum time and effort. One of my favorite tools is a Japanese

ginger grater—it costs all of \$2 and reduces both ginger and garlic to a smooth, silky paste that's perfect in Indian recipes. A Microplane zester works well, too. Don't use a box grater, though; the holes aren't tiny enough, and it's a hassle trying to retrieve a teaspoon of paste from the awkward opening.

whole vs. ground spices

Although some of my recipes call for ground cumin and coriander, don't buy them that way. Buy the whole seeds instead, since you'll also be using them in other forms: whole, coarsely crushed, and roasted. Besides, store-bought ground spices quickly lose their flavor—often while sitting on the shelf. You'll get far better results if you buy one of those \$15 coffee grinders and grind your spices to order. Just be sure to reserve the grinder for spices only—there's nothing worse than cumin-flavored coffee!

Some of my recipes call for roasted cumin and coriander. It's okay to roast and bottle small batches of these spices ahead of time. But again, grind them to order.

Exceptions to the rule: It's hard to find whole turmeric, so it's okay to buy this spice in ground form. Just buy the smallest quantity available and keep the container tightly sealed. Ground cayenne is fine too, for the simple reason that if you tried to grind red chiles, I'd be on your hit list as soon as you recovered from a violent sneezing fit.

cooking oil

Canola oil is used in most of my recipes. It has a high smoke point, which goes well with our tadka technique. I should mention that people in India use a variety of other oils as well: mustard in the

north and east, untoasted sesame and peanut in the west, and coconut in the south. As my mother says, “Even the oil you use should have flavor.” So if you do have a good peanut oil, by all means use it. The other oils—mustard, coconut, and sesame—tend to be pretty strong, so unless you’re very familiar with regional Indian cooking, I would avoid them.

cilantro as a garnish

You’ll notice that a lot of my recipes use minced cilantro as a garnish. Indians love this herb, and Indian recipes are well complemented by it. However, I’m sensitive to the fact that not everyone likes the taste of cilantro. If you’re one of those people, feel free to exclude it from the recipe.

a few words about salt

I’ve used kosher salt for all the recipes in this book. But since people use different types of salt and have different levels of tolerance for it, please use my measurements only as a guideline. The crystals in kosher salt are large, so one tablespoon of kosher salt is roughly equal to half that of regular table salt. Used properly, salt helps bring out the flavor of food, so don’t be afraid of it.

coconut milk

Coconut milk is traditionally made by steeping the grated flesh of fresh coconut in hot water and then squeezing it through cheesecloth to make the creamy liquid that tastes so exquisite in curries. The first press yields the “cream,” and subsequent pressings result in thinner milks used to prepare lighter curries. This is quite a time-consuming process, so I am thankful coconut milk is available in cans now. But I must warn you, not all brands of canned coconut milk are good; some

are downright nasty. Good coconut milk tastes fresh, rich, and mildly sweet. A test is to check if the milk and cream separate inside the can. Artificially homogenized coconut milk has additives that keep the cream from naturally floating to the top. Also, do not use cans labeled “Cream of coconut” in my recipes; this is actually a sweetened, thicker product. Reserve it for your piña coladas. And one last word: Steer clear of “lite” coconut milk, as it has no substance or flavor.

a few menu ideas

are included here to get you started. You can use them as they are, or you can improvise with them—don't let them limit you in any way. Also, as I've mentioned earlier, there are no hard-and-fast rules. Steamed rice goes with just about everything on an Indian menu. And the sky won't fall on your head if you serve a curry without Indian flatbread. In fact, lots of Indians enjoy curry with a rustic bread, sometimes even with sliced white bread.

a last-minute meal

Anglo-Indian Beef Stir-Fry (page 51)
French bread
Tossed green salad

a weeknight supper

Onion and Yogurt Egg Curry (page 66)
Turkey and Basmati Rice Pilaf (page 106)
Spinach Raita with Toasted Cumin (page 95)
Fresh fruit salad with vanilla ice cream

a rainy night dinner

Butternut Squash and Green Beans in a Coconut-Milk Curry (page 28)
Store-bought mango or apricot chutney
Steamed rice

a summer bbq

Thalipeeth (page 107) with Roasted Onion Raita (page 98) as a dip
Lamb Chops with a Spicy Rub (page 54)
Spicy Seared Shrimp (page 75)
Tangy Shredded Cabbage Salad (page 90)
Corn with Mustard Seeds (page 32)
Black-Eyed Pea Salad with Ginger and Red Onion (page 87)

a sunday brunch

Masala Omelet (page 67)
Railway Potatoes (page 20)
Bread and butter
Fresh fruit
Ginger Chai (page 127)

a kids' menu

Mild Fish Stew with Potatoes (page 81)
Goan Savory Crêpes (page 113)
Cardamom Nankaties (page 122)

a girlfriends' lunch

Black-Eyed Peas in a Spicy Goan Curry (page 40)
Crispy Okra Raita (page 93)
Chapati (page 109)
Lemongrass Chai (page 127)

a seafood dinner for six

Shrimp Cakes with Ginger and Cilantro (page 76)
Watercress salad
Goan Shrimp Curry with Eggplant (page 71)
Indian Fried Fish (page 79)
Steamed white rice

a valentine's dinner for two

Mussels in a Green Curry (page 73) with French bread for dipping
Baked Fish in a Spice Broth (page 82)
Fresh green salad
Shrikhand with Yogurt Cheese, Saffron, and Pistachios (page 119)
Vanilla Bean Chai (page 127)

a buffet party

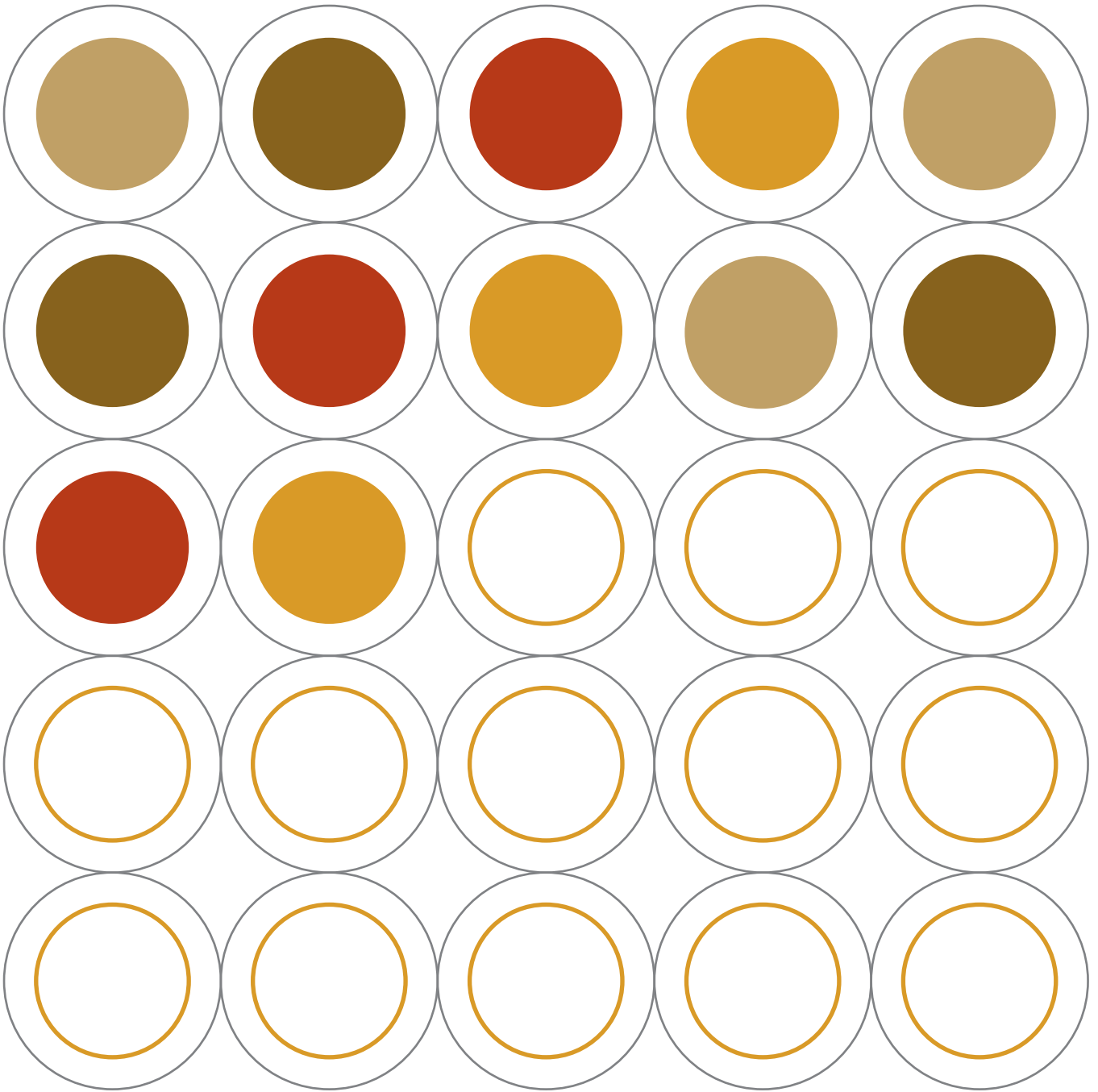
Vegetables with a Minty Lamb and Rice Stuffing (page 52)
Dal Poories (page 111)
Steamed Cauliflower with a Spicy Tomato Sauce (page 26)
Everyday Yellow Dal (page 39)
Crunchy Cucumber Salad with Crushed Peanuts (page 88)
Shrikhand with Yogurt Cheese, Saffron, and Pistachios (page 119)

an elegant dinner for four

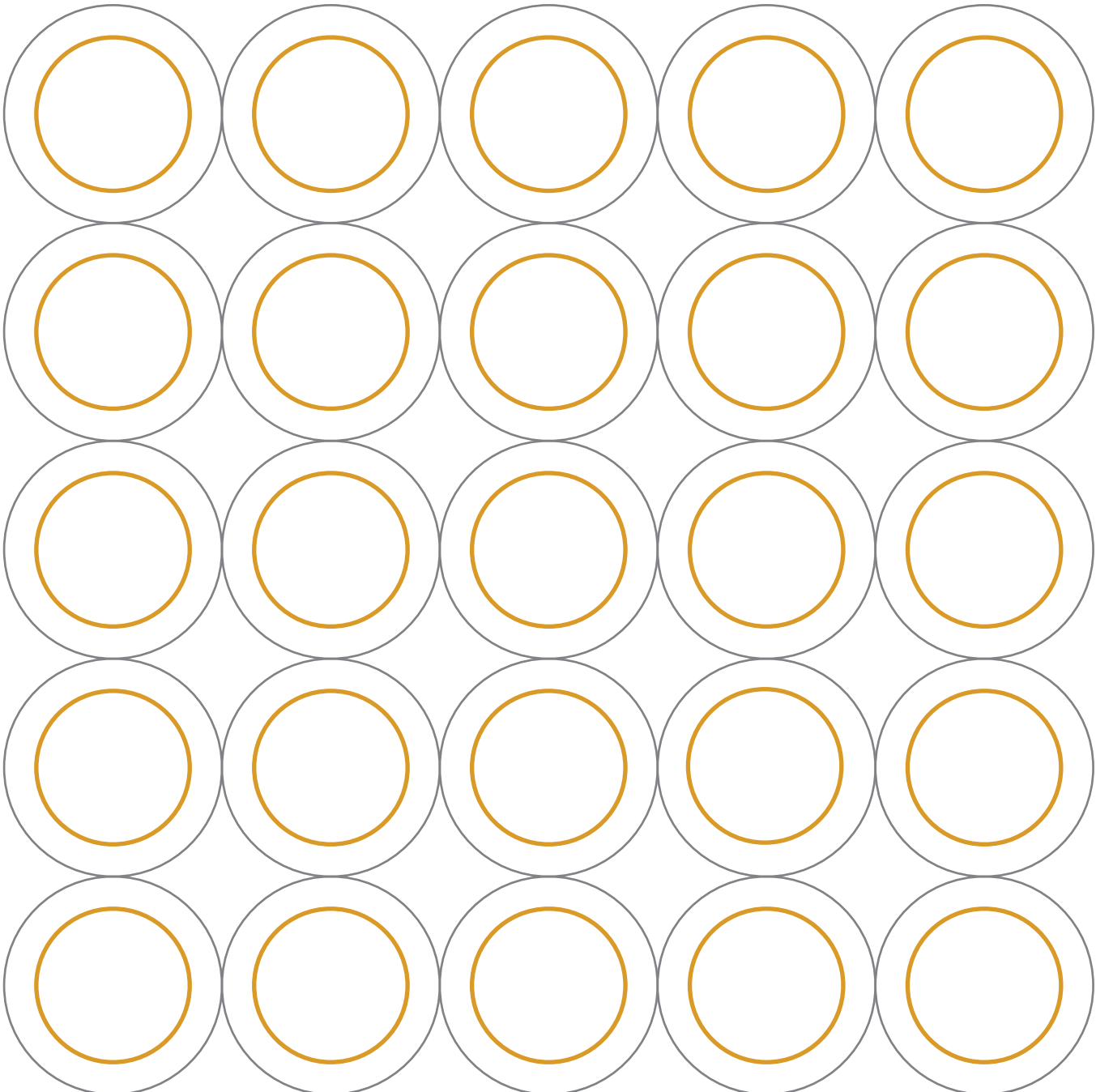
Lamb Chops with a Spicy Rub (page 54)
Crusty Russet Potatoes with Coriander (page 23)
Curried Mushrooms and Peas (page 34)
Rava Tea Cake with Almond Paste and Rose Water (page 120)
Cardamom Chai (page 127)

a holiday spread

Chicken in Cashew Nut Sauce (page 65)
Roasted Lamb with Burnt Onions (page 57)
Sautéed Beets with Mustard and Lemon Juice (page 31)
Sweet Potatoes with Ginger and Lemon (page 24)
Black-Eyed Pea Salad with Ginger and Red Onion (page 87)
Creamy Pumpkin Kheer with Cashew Nuts (page 123)



chapter **1**: vegetables



dishes 1-12

“I don’t miss the meat at all.”

One of the highest compliments I’ve received came from an avowed and life-long carnivore: my husband. Convinced that vegetarians survived on things like boiled beans, he was delighted (and not a little surprised) to discover dishes like Eggplant Stuffed with a Sesame-Peanut Masala. With food like this, it’s easy to be a vegetarian.

And with more than 70 percent of the world’s vegetarians living in India, the breadth of its vegetarian cuisine is simply amazing. So although this section has just twelve recipes, I wanted to showcase as much variety as possible, from the wide range of produce to the way it’s prepared—steamed, curried, sautéed, and stir-fried.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 17 Eggplant Stuffed with a Sesame-Peanut Masala | 28 Butternut Squash and Green Beans in a Coconut-Milk Curry |
| 19 Spicy Eggplant with Tomatoes | 31 Sautéed Beets with Mustard and Lemon Juice |
| 20 Railway Potatoes | 32 Corn with Mustard Seeds |
| 21 A Simple Cabbage Stir-Fry | 34 Curried Mushrooms and Peas |
| 23 Crusty Russet Potatoes with Coriander | 35 Creamed Farmer Greens |
| 24 Sweet Potatoes with Ginger and Lemon | |
| 26 Steamed Cauliflower with a Spicy Tomato Sauce | |

eggplant stuffed with a sesame-peanut masala

This dish is perfect for entertaining. It looks stunning on a serving platter, yet it's exceptionally easy to put together—and can be made ahead of time. As a bonus, it can also be cooked in the oven, freeing up valuable burner space. The dish cooks faster and tastes better prepared the stovetop way, but you can decide what works best for you. I've made it for dinner parties as an entrée for my vegetarian guests but find that I often run out—thanks to the meat eaters at the table! Don't be daunted by the length of the recipe; it really is very simple to make.

¼ cup brown (natural) sesame seeds
½ cup raw or lightly toasted unsalted peanuts
⅓ cup cilantro leaves, finely chopped
2 tablespoons brown sugar
2 teaspoons salt
¼ cup plus 2 teaspoons water, divided
1 teaspoon finely grated garlic (about 2 large cloves)
½ teaspoon cayenne
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
8 mini Indian eggplants or 6 of the smallest Italian or Japanese eggplants you can find (about 1½ pounds)
¼ cup canola oil

Using a coffee grinder or food processor, separately pulse the sesame seeds and peanuts to semi-coarse powders. You don't want fine powders, but neither do you want chunks of peanuts in your filling. Remove to a bowl. Add the cilantro, sugar, salt, 2 teaspoons of the water, garlic, cayenne, and turmeric to the powdered mixture and mix well with your fingers. The mixture should become lumpy—if it doesn't, add a few more drops of water. Taste and adjust the salt and sugar if needed. The filling should taste slightly sweet and a little salty.

Leaving the stem end intact, make 2 intersecting diagonal cuts on the bottom end of each eggplant. You are basically making an “X.” Do not cut all the way through. Be sure to leave the stems on. Stuff each X with the filling, packing it down well. This is easier said than done—it will feel awkward, but just push in as much filling as the eggplant will take, using your fingers to gently pry open the eggplant. Here is where you will thank yourself for having followed instructions to make the filling lumpy, since it sticks together better.

Heat the oil in a skillet large enough to hold all the eggplants in a single layer. Gently place each eggplant in the pan and turn the heat to medium. Turn the eggplants occasionally so they are evenly browned on all sides. Don't worry too much if some of the filling spills out. Once all the eggplants are browned, pour in the remaining ¼ cup water, cover, and cook on low until tender, about 15 minutes. To check doneness, pierce the stem end of each eggplant with

(continued)

eggplant stuffed
with a sesame-peanut
masala (continued)

a small, sharp knife—it should slide in easily. The whole eggplant should feel soft to the touch as well.

Instead of pan braising it, you may braise the eggplant in the oven: Use an ovenproof skillet. After browning the eggplant on the stovetop, pour in the water, cover, and transfer the skillet to a preheated 350°F oven and roast until the eggplant is tender, between 20 and 40 minutes, depending on the size of the eggplant.

This recipe can be made a day ahead. Simply reheat in a 375°F oven until warm.

Serves 4 to 6

TIP: One of my recipe testers in the U.K. came up with an ingenious variation. She couldn't find small eggplants, so she used a single globe eggplant instead, thinly sliced it lengthwise, and softened the slices a bit in hot oil. Then she stuffed each slice with the filling, rolled it up like a jelly roll, and secured it with a toothpick. She followed the rest of the recipe to finish the dish.

spicy eggplant with tomatoes

This eggplant dish has been a hit in my classes ever since I began teaching Indian cooking. It's quite a spicy dish, but remember—you can always reduce the amount of cayenne. To create a complete North Indian vegetarian meal, serve with Chapati (page 109), Creamed Farmer Greens (page 35), and Punjabi Red Beans (page 43).

1 large Italian eggplant (about 1 pound)
3 tablespoons canola oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped (about 1½ cups)
1 teaspoon finely grated garlic (about 2 large cloves)
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger (about 2-inch piece)
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon cumin seeds, finely ground
1 teaspoon cayenne
2 medium tomatoes, finely chopped (about 1½ cups)
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar

Cut the eggplant into ½-inch cubes.

Heat the oil in a large wok over medium heat and sauté the onion until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic, ginger, turmeric, cumin, and cayenne, and sauté for another 2 minutes. If the mixture begins to stick to the bottom of the pan, deglaze by adding a few tablespoons of water and using a spatula to loosen the browned bits.

Add the eggplant, tomatoes, salt, and sugar, and toss until the eggplant is well coated with the onion-spice mixture. Cover and cook over medium-low heat until the eggplant is soft but not mushy, about 10 minutes. Serve warm.

Serves 4

railway potatoes

My parents loved to travel, and they didn't let our school schedules get in the way. Every now and then, they'd pull us out of school for a few days and, much to our delight, we'd find ourselves on a cross-country train en route to our next family adventure. On those journeys, my mother would bring her signature "travel food"—these spicy, oniony potatoes, accompanied by buttery Chapatis (page 109). Even before the train pulled out of the station, my brother and I would be demanding she open the hamper!

1½ pounds medium red potatoes
5 tablespoons canola oil
½ teaspoon mustard seeds
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
1 large yellow onion, halved and
thinly sliced (about 2 cups)
2 teaspoons salt
¼ to ½ teaspoon cayenne

Slice the potatoes lengthwise into quarters. Then cut them crosswise into ⅛-inch-thick slices.

Make the tadka: Heat the oil in a large wok over high heat. When the oil begins to smoke, add the mustard seeds, covering the pan with a lid or spatter screen. After the seeds stop sputtering, add the turmeric and stir for a second. Immediately add the onion, potatoes, salt, and cayenne. Toss well, cover, and cook on medium heat until the potatoes are tender, tossing occasionally, about 10 minutes. Serve now or pack in an airtight container to take on a road trip.

Serves 4

a simple cabbage stir-fry

I clearly remember the first time I ate a version of this dish. I was six years old and couldn't tolerate spicy food at the time. But this cabbage stir-fry was so good, I ate as fast as I could, tears streaming down my face. I figured if I ate really fast I wouldn't feel the pain, and so I wouldn't have to stop eating. Don't worry—the recipe isn't that spicy; I just had a delicate palate as a child. I like my cabbage with some of the crunch left in it, but if you prefer, you can continue cooking until the cabbage is quite soft.

¼ cup canola oil
½ teaspoon mustard seeds
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
1 pound green cabbage, sliced very thinly
2 cloves peeled garlic, smashed with the side of your knife (optional)
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon cayenne

Make the tadka: Heat the oil in a large wok over high heat. When the oil begins to smoke, add the mustard seeds, covering the wok with a lid or spatter screen. After the seeds stop sputtering, add the turmeric and sliced cabbage. Now add the garlic (if using), salt, and cayenne, and toss well.

Cover, reduce the heat to medium, and steam until the cabbage is crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Serve hot.

Serves 4



crusty russet potatoes with coriander

Soft on the inside and crisp on the outside, these potatoes will go very well with your next pot roast or steak. You can also use them to add a subtle Indian touch at breakfast by serving them with buttery scrambled eggs.

4 large russet potatoes (about
2¼ pounds), boiled and peeled
6 tablespoons canola oil
½ teaspoon cumin seeds
2 medium green serrano chiles,
cut lengthwise in quarters
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons coriander seeds,
coarsely crushed

Slice the potatoes lengthwise into quarters. Then cut them crosswise into 1-inch pieces.

Make the tadka: Heat the oil in a large wok over high heat. When the oil begins to smoke, add the cumin seeds, covering the pan with a lid or spatter screen. After the seeds stop sputtering, add the chiles. When the chiles are well toasted, add the turmeric and briefly stir. Add the potatoes and salt, toss well, cover, and leave on medium-high heat until the potatoes are slightly toasted, about 4 minutes.

Uncover and add the coriander seeds and toss well again. Continue to heat uncovered, tossing occasionally, until the potatoes are crusty and well browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Serve warm.

Serves 4

sweet potatoes with ginger and lemon

If you like sweet potatoes, you will absolutely love this dish. The ginger and lemon complement the sweetness of the vegetable. Serve with Dal Poories (page III) for Sunday brunch.

2 pounds sweet potatoes and/or yams
2 tablespoons canola oil
½ teaspoon mustard seeds
2 small green serrano chiles, cut horizontally in half
1 medium red onion, finely chopped (about 1½ cups)
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger (about 2-inch piece)
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
½ to ¾ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons lemon juice, or to taste

Boil the sweet potatoes in water to cover until just tender. Cool, peel, and cut into 1-inch pieces.

Make the tadka: Heat the oil in a large sauté pan over high heat. When the oil begins to smoke, add the mustard seeds, covering the pan with a lid or spatter screen. When the seeds stop sputtering, add the chiles. When the chiles are toasted, add the onion and ginger. Sauté until the onion is lightly browned, then add the turmeric and stir.

Add the sweet potatoes and salt and toss gently to mix. Cover and steam over low heat until the flavors meld, about 4 minutes. Sprinkle the lemon juice over and serve hot or at room temperature.

Serves 4

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