

INDIAN VEGETARIAN
COOKING FROM
AN AMERICAN
KITCHEN

Vasantha Prasad



R A N D O M H O U S E

*I*NDIAN
VEGETARIAN
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FROM AN
AMERICAN
KITCHEN

VASANTHA PRASAD



RANDOM HOUSE NEW YORK

TO MY LOVING PARENTS,

ESPECIALLY MY MOTHER,

WHO INSPIRED ME

TO LEARN AND ENJOY

THE FINE ART

OF INDIAN CUISINE

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I am grateful to my wonderful husband, Balasa, and my adorable daughter, Bindu. Their passion for good vegetarian food motivated me to write this book. Their continued support, encouragement, and cooperation made this possible.

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CONTENTS

❧

Introduction

HELPFUL HINTS

CHAPTER ONE

The Staples of an Indian Kitchen

CHAPTER TWO

Appetizers

CHAPTER THREE

Soups

CHAPTER FOUR

Salads

CHAPTER FIVE

Vegetable Curries

CHAPTER SIX

Rice and Pasta Dishes

CHAPTER SEVEN

Legumes (Dals)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bread

CHAPTER NINE

Uppma (Cream of Wheat Dishes)

CHAPTER TEN

Dosas and Idli

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Sweet Beverages and Desserts

INTRODUCTION

When I was a little girl in Bangalore, in southern India, I loved sitting on our kitchen counter every day after school and watching my *amma* (mother) cook. Balancing several pots on the stove, chopping vegetables, blending spices, she made everything look so easy and graceful. I was absolutely fascinated! When I asked her what makes her cooking so delicious she answered that the secret ingredient to any meal is love.

Because refrigerators were not yet available in India, my mother would shop for fresh vegetables every day. Often I would accompany her, and on those trips she would teach me about selecting fruit and vegetables, relying on our senses to determine freshness. How does it look? she would ask. How does it smell? How does it feel in your hand? Every trip to the farmer's market to buy flowers, fruits, and vegetables was an adventure with her. Each neighborhood had a market, and you could smell its intoxicating scent from afar. Each vendor had a small cubicle averaging eight feet by ten feet and would either specialize by selling only one item such as bananas or coconuts or would sell a wide variety such as apples, apricots, cherries, guava, mangoes, melon, papaya, peaches, pears, pomegranates, and tomatoes. Or a store would sell only vegetables, and among them would be French beans, broad beans, cluster beans, cauliflower, cucumber, bell peppers, *brinjal* (eggplant), green chilies (mild and hot), three different kinds of gourds, and pumpkins and plantains. My mother would say that with a little imagination you can capture the extraordinary freshness and flavor of the market and release it in your cooking.

In this cookbook I've tried to do just that: to capture the love of cooking I inherited from my mother, of freshness, of family, and, because I have lived with my husband and daughter in America for many years, adapt it for an American kitchen. I've tried to translate the way we cook in India—how we combine tastes such as sweet and sour, hot and cool, using spices and other ingredients—and make it enticing for the home cook who may not be familiar with Indian cooking, or who loves Indian cooking but feels intimidated by the ingredients, or who wants to use Western ingredients and cook them in an Indian fashion. I've tried to include the new with the traditional, the Western with the Eastern. And Indian cooking is nutritional, sound, full of complex carbohydrates such as grains and legumes, and including fruits, vegetables, yogurt, and milk. It is healthy cooking at its most interesting with full, complex tastes and flavors; there is nothing bland about red hot chilies!

The basics of Indian cooking are simple: Cook with your hands, your eyes, your nose, your ears, and your taste. Often I will describe when something is done by the way it sizzles in the pan or the color it turns or how it feels to the touch. I want you to learn how to use all your five senses to cook, using Indian methods but not strictly Indian ingredients. You may not easily find some of the Indian ingredients in your neighborhood, so when appropriate I've given substitutions such as lime juice for tamarind water or half-and-half for coconut milk. Once you get the hang of it, you'll be able to create your own dishes using your favorite fruits and vegetables and combining the spices in new and innovative ways. As my *amma* said, the most important ingredient in cooking is love.

HELPFUL HINTS

1.

Always wash all vegetables and fruits thoroughly with water, whether grown organically or not.

2.

The preparation and cooking times that I have provided serve as a guideline—each cook works at his/her own pace. Stove tops and ovens tend to vary in temperature settings.

3.

If you are unable to eat hot peppers due to health reasons or sensitive taste buds, omit them. I assure you the finished dish will still be tasty. Remember to decrease the amount of salt if you decide to use fewer hot peppers.

CHAPTER 1



THE STAPLES OF AN INDIAN KITCHEN

SPICES AND SEASONINGS

YOGURT, GHEE, CHEESES, AND MILK SAUCE

RELISHES

CHUTNEYS

PICKLES

MASALA POWDERS

TAMARIND WATER

SPROUTING PULSES

SAUCES

THE STAPLES OF AN INDIAN KITCHEN

SPICES AND SEASONINGS

ASAFETIDA • (Heeng)

Asafetida is a brown resin obtained from the roots of a certain Indian plant. It is available either in lump form (its purest state) or powdered, which is more convenient to use. Asafetida releases its characteristic smell only when powdered.

Asafetida's distinctive, pungent flavor and aroma is used to season dal or lentil dishes, chutneys, and so on. It has strong digestive properties and is used to counteract flatulence.

Asafetida is prepared by adding only 1/8 teaspoon to 1 teaspoon hot vegetable oil. Heat until it releases its strong odor, usually after only a few seconds.

BAY LEAF • (Tej Patta)

There are two kinds of bay leaves. The Indian bay leaf comes from the cassia tree and has a sweet taste with a spicy aroma. It is mainly used in the preparation of meat dishes. The other variety comes from the bay tree, native to China and southeast Asia, and has a bitter taste with a lemony aroma. Use the latter variety in smaller quantities.

CARDAMOM • (Elaichi)

The fruit of the cardamom plant, the cardamom pod, comes in two colors: green and black. The black cardamom is available in Indian and specialty stores. It is sold only in the whole form, although it is used either whole or powdered to prepare garam masala, relishes, and rice pilafs. Black cardamom has a nuttier flavor than green cardamom, which can be substituted if the black is unavailable.

Green cardamom has a pale green skin and a sweet taste and is available either whole or powdered. It is mainly used in flavoring puddings, sweets, and many classic vegetarian dishes.

Cardamoms can be added along with other spices in preparing tea and are also chewed after dinner as breath fresheners.

CAROM • (Ajwain)

Carom is the seed of the thymol plant, which grows in southern India. The seeds look very much like celery seeds but have a sharp taste and smell like thyme. Carom is used in the preparation of pickles as well as for seasoning many vegetarian dishes.

CILANTRO • (Hara Dhania)

Fresh cilantro leaves, sometimes called fresh coriander, come from the same plant.

(Coriandrum sativum) as coriander seeds. Latino markets and mainstream groceries refer to this plant as “cilantro”; Asian markets will call it “Chinese parsley.” Cilantro resembles Italian flat-leaf parsley, although the cilantro leaves are lighter green, thinner, and more fragrant than parsley. Fresh cilantro should be cleaned and stored like fresh parsley.

CINNAMON • (Dalchini)

Cinnamon comes in two varieties. Indian cinnamon is the bark of the cassia tree. The bark is peeled in long strips, called cinnamon sticks. This has a reddish brown color with a sweet delicate taste and strong aroma. The other cinnamon is the bark of the cinnamon tree. The bark is slender and smooth and has a milder aroma than the Indian variety. They can be used interchangeably.

CLOVE • (Lavang)

Cloves are the dried flower buds of the clove tree. They are dark brown with a sharp taste and available either whole or powdered.

CORIANDER SEED • (Dhania)

Coriander seed is the ripe fruit of the coriander plant. It is round and light brown in color and has a strong, nutty aroma. It is available in three forms: whole, powdered, or ground. It is used to thicken sauces and to season sautéed vegetable dishes. Ground coriander is available in Indian stores and other specialty markets.

CUMIN • (Jeera)

Cumin is the dried ripe fruit of the cumin plant. It comes in two varieties, white and black. In India, it is one of the most widely used spices, whole or powdered. White cumin, commonly referred to as cumin, is actually yellowish brown in color. It resembles the caraway seed in shape, but it is larger in size. Black cumin (known as royal cumin, or shahi jeera) is sweeter than white cumin. This also resembles the caraway seed but is smaller. White cumin is available whole or powdered; black cumin is only available whole.

CURRY LEAVES • (Curry Patta or Meethe Neam ke Patte)

Curry leaves are shiny, thin, and dark green in color; they are used in dal.

FENNEL SEED • (Saunf)

Fennel seed, from the fennel plant, has a sweet licorice or anise taste. It is used whole or powdered. The thinner seed, known as lakhnawi saunf, is served as an after-dinner mint.

FENUGREEK • (Methi)

Fenugreek seed (*Trigonella foenumgraecum*) is a small legume with a bitter taste. It is used

both whole and powdered, and is usually dry-roasted to enhance its flavor. Fresh fenugreek leaves are slightly bitter and are used to prepare dal stews. Dried leaves are used as herbs.

GINGER • (Adrak)

Fresh ginger is the underground root of the ginger plant (*Azingiber officinale*) grown in Asia. Fresh ginger is used shredded, minced, or pureed. It stays fresh for many days in the refrigerator.

Ginger is also available in a powdered form and is used in sweet pickles and relishes.

MANGO POWDER • (Amchoor)

A tan-colored powder made from peeled, unripe, tart, sun-dried mangoes. It has a pungent aroma and a sour taste and is used instead of lime juice or tamarind. It is available in Indian grocery stores.

MUSTARD • (Rai)

The seed from the mustard plant, *Brassica juncea*, is tiny, round, and brownish-black or purplish-black. Black mustard seeds, ground or cooked, impart a spicy flavor. It can be used whole or powdered, to prepare pickles as well as other vegetable dishes.

NUTMEG • (Jaiphul)

Nutmeg is the dark brown nut enclosed within the mace membrane. The shell is dried, then grated into a powder. Nutmeg is available either whole or powdered. Its sweet taste and mild fragrance is used in the preparation of relishes and garam masala.

PAPRIKA • (Deghi Mirch)

The chili pod of the plant capsicum is sun-dried and ground to produce mild red chili powder similar to Hungarian paprika. It turns food a brilliant red.

POMEGRANATE • (Anardana)

These plump seeds are enclosed in the honeycombed membrane of the deep red fruit. The seeds can be eaten raw, or dried and used as a spice. Dried, powdered pomegranate is used in Indian cooking.

POPPY SEED, WHITE • (Khas-Khas)

The white seeds from the poppy plant are available whole, and when raw their taste is very mild; when roasted, the seeds are ground with other spices to season primarily vegetable dishes.

RED PEPPER • (Lal Mirch)

Red pepper, the ripe, sun-dried chili pod of the capsicum plant, is available whole, as a powder or in flakes. The spicy red pepper is an essential ingredient in Indian cooking.

SAFFRON • (Kesar)

Saffron is the dried stigma of the flower of the saffron plant (*Crocus sativus*). It is one of the most expensive spices in the world and is available either in reddish-brown threads or powdered. It imparts a beautiful orange-yellow color to a dish. Because of its strong flavor, it should be used sparingly. Saffron is used in puddings, sweets, and pilafs.

TAMARIND • (Imli)

Tamarind is the pulpy pod of the tropical plant *Tamarindus indica*, grown in India. It is brownish-black in color and tastes tart. The ripe tamarind pods are peeled and pitted, and the pulp compressed into small cakes. Tamarind is widely used in southern India to prepare lentils, chutneys, and vegetable dishes. It is also available in the form of paste at Asian grocery stores (tamarind paste).

TURMERIC • (Haldi)

Turmeric is the root of the tropical plant *Curcuma longa*. The roots are cleaned, boiled, dried, and pulverized into an aromatic yellow powder. It is mainly used in dals and vegetable dishes to impart a characteristic yellow color.

YOGURT, GHEE, CHEESES, AND MILK SAUCE

YOGURT (DAHI)

❧

Yogurt is used in Indian cooking to prepare cold drinks (lassi), dressing for salads (raita), relishes, sauces, and soups.

While yogurt is readily available in supermarkets, homemade yogurt is definitely tastier, fresher, and more economical than commercial brands. There are yogurt makers available for home use, but to make yogurt you really don't need one. Any bowl—glass, china, Pyrex, or stainless steel—with a lid can be used. Yogurt sets best when the temperature of the milk is around 105 degrees; at this temperature the yogurt culture is added. Place the bowl of milk in a gas oven with the pilot light on, or on a low-set heating pad, or near a radiator—as long as the temperature of 75–80 degrees is maintained; too cold, the yogurt will not set, too hot, the yogurt will turn sour.

1 quart (4 cups) milk (whole, 2%, 1%, or skim, according to your preference)

2 Tbsp. plain yogurt

In a heavy-bottomed saucepan, bring the milk to a boil. Once the milk begins to rise in the pan, turn off the heat and let it cool to 105 degrees. Pour the milk in a bowl. Add the yogurt

cover, and leave in a warm place where the temperature is maintained around 75–80 degrees. Leave it to set undisturbed for about 7 or 8 hours. Homemade yogurt will keep in the refrigerator for 3 days.

YOGURT CHEESE



Yogurt cheese tastes better and has fewer calories than commercial cream cheese. It is very easy to make. Whole milk yogurt makes a creamier cheese, but it can be made with low-fat and nonfat yogurt as well. This soft cheese is excellent for dips, salads, and spreads.

MAKES 1 CUP

2 cups (16 oz.) plain yogurt

Line a strainer with either a double layer of cheesecloth or a paper coffee filter. Set the strainer in a bowl deep enough for the yogurt to drip into. Put the yogurt in the strainer and let it drain into the bowl overnight in the refrigerator. Spoon the cheese from the filter or cheesecloth into a container. You can either refrigerate it, covered, as is or season the cheese to taste with salt, white pepper, herbs, or chopped scallions or cilantro, then cover and refrigerate.

CLARIFIED BUTTER (GHEE)



1 pound (4 sticks) unsalted butter

In a heavy-bottomed saucepan, heat the butter over medium-low heat. Once the butter melts, a thin layer of white foam forms on the top. After 10 minutes, the foam subsides. As soon as the butter fat residue starts to brown, the foam forms on the top again. Push the foam aside to see if the bottom residue is brown. If so, turn off the heat. Let cool. The butter has now separated into clear liquid on top and brown residue on the bottom. Pour the clear liquid into a jar through a fine sieve or through a double layer of cheesecloth. Make sure that the brown residue from the bottom is kept separate and is discarded. Let the clear liquid cool completely. Cover. Ghee keeps for 4 to 6 weeks on the counter or 2 to 3 months in the refrigerator.

INDIAN CHEESE (CHENNA AND PANEER)



Chenna is a fine-grained homemade Indian cheese, very similar to pot cheese or ricotta cheese, but much drier. Chenna is used primarily in sweets.

When chenna is compressed into a cake and cut into small rectangles it is called paneer. Paneer acts like a sponge, soaking up the flavor of whatever spices it is cooked with. It is used in savory dishes such as Green Peas and Homemade Cheese in Tomato Sauce (Matar Paneer) or Spinach with Homemade Cheese (Saag Paneer).

2 quarts (8 cups) whole milk

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup lemon juice or 1 cup plain low fat yogurt

1. In a heavy-bottomed saucepan, bring the milk to a boil. Reduce the heat and slowly add the lemon juice or yogurt, stirring gently with a spoon. As soon as white curds form and are separating from the yellow whey, turn off the heat. Cover and leave it on the counter to set for 10 minutes.
2. If after 10 minutes you see only a few curds of chenna and most of the liquid is still milk, repeat the process, adding a little more lemon juice or yogurt.
3. Line a colander or sieve with a triple layer of cheesecloth, and put it in the sink. Pour the curds and the whey into the sieve, draining the whey. A convenient way to drain the cheese further is to gather up the four corners of the cheesecloth and tie them together with a piece of string long enough to secure to the faucet. Let it hang on the faucet for 2 hours to drain. Then squeeze out as much liquid as possible.
4. This moist, drained cheese is chenna. Turn chenna out onto a clean, dry work surface and knead for 10 to 15 minutes, until the texture is fine and slightly grainy.
5. To make paneer, hang the chenna bundle on the kitchen faucet or over a bowl overnight. In the morning, untie the bundle. Leaving the cheese in the cheesecloth, flatten it by placing a heavy object, such as soup cans or a pot filled with water, on top of the cheese for 2 hours. This compressed cheese should be about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick.
6. Remove the cheese from the cheesecloth and cut into cubes with a sharp knife. Paneer keeps for 4 days in the refrigerator. It is very delicate and is usually fried with a little oil or butter, or ghee to a golden brown and then used to finish a dish. Paneer, like tofu, is full of protein but essentially tasteless. The taste comes from the flavors of the food with which it is cooked.

THICKENED MILK SAUCE (RABADI)

82

Rabadi is traditionally used in desserts such as a pudding with nuts (Cream Pudding).

MAKES 2 CUPS

2 quarts (8 cups) milk

In a heavy-bottomed saucepan, bring the milk to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer, stirring constantly to ensure that the milk doesn't stick to the bottom of the pan. After 45 minutes the milk should be reduced to $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups and have the consistency of a thick cream sauce. Cool and then refrigerate.

RELISHES

In Indian cooking, vegetable relishes are used as condiments or accompaniments to many dishes. The vegetables are chopped or grated and seasoned with a dash of salt, pepper, and lime juice. The following recipes make 2 cups.

A NOTE ABOUT HOT PEPPERS: Many of the recipes call for hot peppers, such as jalapeños or green chilies. Please exercise caution when cooking with hot peppers. Be sure to wash your hands thoroughly after handling them, being careful not to touch your face or especially your eyes after touching the seeds. You may want to use rubber gloves when handling the peppers to prevent an accident. If you have never eaten a dish with hot peppers, it is best to use hot peppers sparingly until your palate gets accustomed to them. In the recipes in this book, I have given the option of how many peppers to include according to your taste.

RAW ONION RELISH



2 red or Vidalia onions, peeled and thinly sliced

1 green chili pepper, seeded and sliced

1 Tbsp. lime or lemon juice

Salt to taste

Rinse the onion slices in cold water three or four times. Gently squeeze out excess water and put in a bowl. Stir in the chili pepper, lime juice, and salt. Refrigerate.

ONION, TOMATO, AND CUCUMBER RELISH



1 tomato, seeded, pulped, and sliced

1 red onion, peeled and thinly sliced

1 pickle or kirby cucumber, peeled, seeded, and cut into ¼ inch dice

1 green bell pepper, seeded and finely chopped

¼ tsp. cayenne pepper

⅛ tsp. ground cumin

1 Tbsp. lime or lemon juice

1 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro

Salt to taste

In a bowl, combine all the ingredients. Stir. Refrigerate for 15 minutes or until ready to serve.

GRATED CUCUMBER RELISH



6 kirby cucumbers (any other variety, 2 cucumbers)

1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced

1 Tbsp. lime or lemon juice

1 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro

⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Salt to taste

Peel, half, and seed the cucumbers. Grate the cucumbers into a bowl. Cover and refrigerate. When you are ready to serve, squeeze excess moisture from cucumbers and stir in the lime or lemon juice, cilantro, pepper, and salt.

SHREDDED CARROT AND ONION RELISH

82

4 carrots, peeled and finely grated
1 red onion, peeled and finely chopped
1 Tbsp. lime or lemon juice
2 green chilies, seeded and chopped
1 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro
Salt to taste

In a bowl, mix all the ingredients except the salt. Cover and refrigerate. When you are ready to serve, add salt and stir. If you do not like the taste of raw carrots, you can stir-fry the grated carrots with 1 teaspoon of vegetable oil for 5 minutes. Proceed with the recipe.

CHUTNEYS

Chutneys are wonderful accompaniments to breads, dal, rice, and vegetable dishes. Like relishes, chutneys rely on hot peppers for some of their flavor.

FRESH COCONUT AND MINT CHUTNEY

82

While fresh coconut is preferable, frozen grated coconut is available in Hispanic grocery stores and some supermarkets. If neither fresh nor frozen coconut is available, you can use dried, powdered, or flaked unsweetened coconut instead.

MAKES 1 ½ CUPS

1 cup fresh or defrosted frozen coconut
8 fresh mint leaves
¼ cup fresh cilantro
1–2 jalapeño peppers, with or without seeds according to taste
2 tsp. brown sugar
½ inch fresh ginger, peeled
1 Tbsp. fresh lime juice or
½ tsp. tamarind paste
8 unsalted cashews
Salt to taste
¼ cup water

In a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade, process all ingredients to a smooth, creamy puree. Serve either chilled or at room temperature. To use as a dipping sauce for fried appetizers, add a little more water to thin the puree.

FRESH COCONUT, FRESH CILANTRO, AND TAMARIND CHUTNEY

82

This chutney is a must for masala dosas, and it also goes well with samosas or any savory fritters; or serve it as a dipping sauce for raw vegetables. Chana is a legume available at Indian grocery stores. If chana is unavailable you can substitute yellow split peas.

2 Tbsp. chana dal or yellow split peas
1 cup grated fresh coconut
2 green chilies or jalapeño peppers, stemmed
½ cup chopped fresh cilantro
½ tsp. salt
1 tsp. tamarind paste
1 tsp. brown sugar
8 unsalted cashew
½ cup water

In a small saucepan over medium heat, roast chana dal until it turns a shade darker, about 10 minutes. In a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade, process dal, coconut, peppers, cilantro, salt, tamarind paste, brown sugar, cashews, and water to a creamy, smooth puree. Store in a container.

The traditional way of finishing this dish is by adding the following seasoning:

2 tsp. vegetable oil
1 tsp. black mustard seeds
10 fresh curry leaves, if available
¼ tsp. ground asafetida

In a small saucepan with a lid, heat the oil. Once the oil is hot, add the mustard seeds and cover until you hear the seeds sputter. Reduce the heat; add the curry leaves and asafetida. Turn off the heat and pour this on the chutney and stir. Cover and refrigerate. This chutney keeps for 2 days.

FRESH MINT CHUTNEY (PUDINA CHUTNEY)

❧

Fresh mint chutney is one of the most popular chutneys. Its clean, sharp taste makes it an excellent accompaniment to any dish: rice, bread, or fried savories. This chutney *must* be made with fresh mint.

MAKES 1 ½ CUPS

2 cups fresh mint leaves
½–1 tsp. crushed red pepper, to taste
2 Tbsp. lime juice
½ cup dried coconut
¼ cup water
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. brown sugar

In a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade, puree all of the ingredients, except the oil. Heat the oil in a small saucepan. Add the chutney carefully, making sure the hot oil does not spatter, and stir-fry for 10 minutes until the mixture turns pale green and releases a minty aroma. Let it cool. Transfer to a bowl and refrigerate, covered. This chutney stays fresh in the refrigerator for 1 week.

FRESH CILANTRO CHUTNEY



This chutney goes well with any vegetable fritters and is excellent as a dipping sauce.

MAKES 1 CUP

½ cup grated fresh coconut
¼ cup unsalted chopped cashews
1 cup loosely packed fresh cilantro
1-3 green chilies or jalapeño
peppers, tops removed,
according to taste
½ inch fresh ginger, peeled and chopped
¼ cup water
1 tsp. brown sugar
1 tsp. salt
2 Tbsp. fresh lime juice or 1 tsp. tamarind paste

In a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade, puree all the ingredients. Pour into a bowl, cover, and refrigerate. This keeps for 2 days. Remove from the refrigerator half an hour before serving.

SOUR MANGO CHUTNEY



There are two varieties of mangoes. One is green and firm and considered “raw mango”; this is used for chutney and pickles. The fresh, sweet mangoes are red and eaten as fruit. This recipe calls for the raw mango.

MAKES 2 CUPS

2 firm, raw mangoes (about 2 lbs.)
½ tsp. cayenne pepper, or more to taste
½ tsp. salt
2 Tbsp. brown sugar
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. ground coriander
½ tsp. powdered ginger

Peel and seed the mangoes; cut the pulp into ½-inch pieces. In a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade, puree the mangoes, cayenne pepper, salt, brown sugar, cumin, coriander, and ginger. Taste for tartness. If too sour, add more brown sugar and process another minute. For extra spiciness, add dried red pepper. Cover and refrigerate. Although this chutney tastes best when freshly prepared, it will keep in the refrigerator for 4 days.

HOT TOMATO CHUTNEY



Make this chutney when tomatoes are in season and serve it with bread, dal, or vegetable dishes.

MAKES 1 CUP

- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil or olive oil*
- 1 tsp. cumin seeds*
- 1–2 jalapeño peppers or green chilies, sliced, to taste*
- 2 whole dried red chilies*
- 1 lb. ripe tomatoes, cored and coarsely chopped*
- 3 Tbsp. brown sugar*
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon*
- ¼ tsp. black pepper*
- ½ tsp. salt*

In a large skillet, heat the oil. When the oil is hot but not smoking, reduce the heat and add the cumin seeds, jalapeño peppers, and dried red chilies, and sauté until the cumin seeds darken and turn brown. Reduce the heat to medium-low and add the tomatoes, brown sugar, cinnamon, pepper, and salt, and cook, stirring, for 15 minutes until chutney thickens. Serve warm or chilled. This chutney will keep in the refrigerator for 3 days.

SWEET TOMATO CHUTNEY



This chutney goes well on toasted bread. If you want to make it spicier, add more red peppers and ¼ teaspoon garam masala. *It takes about 40 minutes to prepare.*

MAKES 1 CUP

- 1 lb. ripe tomatoes, peeled, cored, seeded, and chopped*
- 1 red onion, peeled and finely chopped*
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced*
- ½ cup white wine vinegar or cider vinegar*
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper or paprika*
- ½ tsp. powdered ginger*
- ½ cup brown sugar*
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper*
- ¼ tsp. ground cumin*

In a large, heavy-bottomed, nonreactive pot, bring all the ingredients to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for 30 minutes, until the sauce becomes fairly thick and glossy and is no longer watery. Taste for salt and sugar as needed. Let cool completely and refrigerate. In a tightly sealed, sterilized jar, refrigerated, this chutney stays fresh for 1 month.

FRESH PINEAPPLE AND RAISIN CHUTNEY

❧

This spicy chutney is an excellent accompaniment for any vegetable dish.

MAKES 2 CUPS

1 ripe pineapple, peeled, cored, diced, with its juice
½ cup golden raisins
2 jalapeño peppers, stems removed, seeded if desired, and minced
1–2 dried red peppers or ½ tsp. crushed red pepper
1 red onion, peeled and finely chopped
1 red bell pepper, seeded and finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. ground coriander
¼ tsp. ground cloves
2 Tbsp. brown sugar
½ cup white wine vinegar
Salt to taste

In a heavy-bottomed nonreactive pot, bring all the ingredients to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 45 minutes until the chutney is thick and glossy. Cool to room temperature. The chutney keeps, refrigerated, for 2 weeks.

SWEET AND SOUR TAMARIND CHUTNEY (IMLI CHUTNEY)

❧

This chutney is the best accompaniment to savory samosas, pastries with spicy potato and pea filling. Tamarind is available in specialty Asian markets.

MAKES 2 CUPS

1 small lime-size tamarind pulp
¼ cup brown sugar
¾ cup chopped pitted dates
1 tsp. dry-roasted cumin seeds
¼ tsp. cayenne pepper (optional)
1 tsp. salt

Soak the tamarind in a bowl with 1 cup of boiling water for 15 minutes. Mash the pulp with the back of a spoon or with your fingers to a thick, lumpy consistency. In a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade, puree the pulp, brown sugar, dates, cumin seeds, cayenne, and salt. Covered and refrigerated, this chutney stays fresh for 2 weeks.

FRESH GINGER AND COCONUT CHUTNEY

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This is a spicy chutney that can be served with any mild dish and is a terrific dipping sauce for vegetable fritters.

MAKES 1 CUP

1 cup dried coconut powder or ½ cup unsalted cashews
2 inches fresh ginger, peeled and sliced
1 tsp. tamarind paste or 1 Tbsp. lime juice
6 dried red hot peppers or 3 jalapeño peppers, stemmed
1 tsp. salt
⅓ cup water
2 tsp. vegetable oil

1. In a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade, puree all the ingredients, except the oil.
2. In a saucepan, heat the oil and carefully add the puree. Saute for 5 minutes, until the mixture releases the smell of ginger. Remove from the heat and let cool. Serve at room temperature. This keeps fresh refrigerated for 1 week.

PICKLES (ACHAR)

Achar, or pickles, are fruit or vegetables steeped in salt, vinegar, and spices; they are used as a flavorful accompaniment to any meal. While many varieties of pickles are available in Indian grocery stores, they are easy to make at home. Although they are time-consuming to prepare, nothing beats the superb flavor of homemade pickles.

HOT LEMON PICKLE (NIMBOO KA ACHAR)

❧

Although this is called Hot Lemon Pickle, I prefer the taste of limes to lemons. This pickle goes well with yogurt rice or toast.

MAKES 2 CUPS

4 fresh limes
3 Tbsp. salt

SPICE MIXTURE:

½ tsp. black mustard seeds

1 tsp. fenugreek seeds

1 tsp. ground turmeric

½ tsp. ground asafetida

TO PREPARE THE PICKLE:

½ cup vegetable oil or peanut oil

1 tsp. cayenne pepper

1. Wash the limes and wipe them completely dry because any moisture will spoil the pickle. Cut the limes in half, then each half into quarters. Put all the lime pieces into a sterilized jar and add the salt; mix and cover the jar with a lid. Keep it in a cool, dry place for a week, stirring the pickles once every 2 days. After a week the lime pieces should be slightly tender.

2. Heat a small saute pan and add the mustard and fenugreek seeds. Roast over medium heat for 5 minutes, until the mustard seeds turn gray and the fenugreek seeds turn dark brown. Add the turmeric and asafetida, and roast for 10 seconds. Take off the heat and let cool. In a coffee grinder or with a mortar and pestle, grind the spices to a fine powder. Set aside.

3. To prepare the pickle:

Heat the oil in a small saucepan and turn off the heat. Add the spice mixture to the hot oil, stir, and pour over the lime pieces along with the cayenne pepper. Mix well. This pickle keeps for months in the refrigerator.

RAW MANGO PICKLE (AAM KA ACHAR)

82

Fresh raw mangoes are available only in spring and summer—the best time to prepare this pickle. Unlike the previous recipe, this pickle does not require a week-long steep. You can serve it immediately with any vegetable dish and yogurt rice.

MAKES 3 CUPS

2 raw mangoes

1 to 2 Tbsp. salt

1 tsp. cayenne pepper

FOR THE SEASONING:

2 Tbsp. light vegetable oil

1 tsp. black mustard seeds

½ tsp. ground asafetida

8–10 fresh curry leaves (optional)

1. Wash the mangoes and wipe them completely dry. Even the slightest bit of moisture can spoil the pickle. Do not peel the mangoes. Cut the mangoes into ½-inch cubes and discard the seed. Put the cubes in a glass bowl and add the salt and cayenne pepper. Mix well.

2. In a small pan, heat the oil. When hot add the mustard seeds. Because the seeds will pop and sputter, cover the pan with a lid. When the seeds stop sputtering, add the asafetida (and

the curry leaves if desired). Once the mixture starts to sizzle, turn off the heat. Pour the contents of the pan over the mango pieces and mix well. This pickle keeps for 2 to 3 weeks in the refrigerator.

JALAPEÑO PEPPERS IN VINEGAR

❧

Raw, these peppers are very hot, but they lose their bite when they are marinated in white wine vinegar. You can use these hot peppers in a salad or sandwich or to perk up any mild vegetable dish. See note on handling hot peppers.

MAKES 2 CUPS

- 1 lb. jalapeño peppers
- 1 bottle (16 oz.) distilled white wine vinegar
- 2 Tbsp. salt
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ½ tsp. ground asafetida

1. Wash the jalapeño peppers and drain in a colander for an hour. Pour the vinegar, salt, black pepper, and asafetida into a sterilized jar.
2. Dry the peppers thoroughly with paper towels. Holding the stem, cut each pepper into ¼ inch rounds. Discard the stems. Put the slices in the jar with the vinegar mixture. Cover the jar with a lid and shake vigorously to mix. Set aside for 4 to 5 days until the peppers turn pale, losing their bright green color.
3. This pickle will keep fresh in the refrigerator for months.

MASALA POWDERS

The word *masala* means “spices.” These powders are prepared by roasting spices and then grinding them to a fine texture. Masala powders are available in Indian grocery stores and many specialty stores. But with a sauté pan and a coffee grinder, it is easy to make your own masala powders. The general procedure is to dry-roast them by stirring the spices in a sauté pan over medium heat for about 4 to 5 minutes. When the spices turn a shade darker and emit a distinct aroma, turn off the heat and let them cool. Grind them to a fine powder. In an airtight jar, the flavor stays fresh for about 4 months.

ROASTED CUMIN POWDER (BHOONA JIRA)

❧

MAKES ½ CUP

Dry-roast and grind ½ cup of cumin seeds according to the general procedure, as described above.

ROASTED CORIANDER AND CUMIN POWDER (DHANIA-JIRA POWDER)

❧

This simple combination of spices is used in many sautéed vegetable dishes. Dry-roast and grind $\frac{3}{4}$ cup coriander seeds and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cumin seeds according to the general procedure, as described on.

BASIC CURRY POWDER

MAKES $\frac{1}{2}$ CUP

- 3 Tbsp. coriander seeds
- 1 Tbsp. cumin seeds
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. black peppercorns
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. fenugreek seeds
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. mustard seeds
- 6-8 dried red chilies

Dry-roast and grind all the ingredients according to the general procedure, as described on. Store in an airtight container, stored in a cool, dry place, curry powder keeps for 6 months.

GARAM MASALA



Garam masala means “hot spices”—a common term used for a combination of many ground spices. I call this “Grand Masala” because a pinch of this makes any mild dish grand.

MAKES $\frac{1}{2}$ CUP

- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 3 cinnamon sticks, 3 inches long, chopped
- 2 Tbsp. green cardamom seeds
- 1 Tbsp. whole black peppercorns
- 1 Tbsp. whole cloves

In a saucepan, heat the oil. Add the cinnamon sticks and sauté until they release their aroma. With a slotted spoon, remove the cinnamon sticks, and repeat the procedure with the cardamom seeds and the peppercorns. When sautéing the cloves, use a lid to cover the pan as they have a tendency to spatter. Combine the roasted spices and grind them to a powder in a coffee grinder. Garam masala keeps for 2 months in an airtight container.

NOTE: You can use store-bought ground cinnamon, cardamom, peppercorns, and cloves, but the result definitely will not have the same pungency or taste as home-ground garam masala.

TAMARIND WATER

MAKES $\frac{1}{2}$ CUP

- 1 small lime-size tamarind pulp or 1 Tbsp. tamarind paste

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