



*Monica's
Indian Express*

*Simple & Sassy
Weeknight Dishes*

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By
Monica Bhide

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Introduction

Welcome to my first e-book! I am delighted to share with you a collection of some of the most popular recipes on my site. I hope you will enjoy them and make them part of your weekly cooking routine!

Fried ginger, purple potato and yellow tomato salad



This simple salad celebrates the best of summer. I love all the colors and the ginger adds a delightful crunch.

6 small purple potatoes, washed and scrubbed clean

20 or so small tomatoes, different colors and kinds

¼ basil leaves, finely chopped

Juice of one lemon

1/2 tablespoon chaat masala (or use any savory salt of your choice but reduce the quantity)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1-inch ginger, peeled and thinly sliced

½ teaspoon salt or to taste

1 teaspoon roasted and ground cumin

1. Boil the potatoes until fork tender. Remove from heat. Drain and let them cool to room temperature. Peel and dice into small cubes
2. In the meantime, slice the tomatoes in half and place them in a deep bowl. Season with basil, lemon juice and chaat masala. Cover and let it sit for at least 20 minutes. This will help the flavors meld.

3. Heat a tablespoon of the oil in a medium size flat pan. Add the ginger and cook for about 2 minutes or until the ginger becomes crisp and changes color to a medium brown. Drain on a paper towel.
4. In the same pan, add the rest of the oil and then the potatoes. Pan-fry the potatoes for a few minutes until the outside is just crispy. Add the salt and the cumin. Remove from heat.
5. To serve: create a bed of the tomato salad, top with the potatoes and finally garnish with the fried ginger.
6. You can also toss it all together or serve these as two different side salads.

Individually Spiced Whole Roasted Baby Cauliflower



I found tiny (as in a small muffin) sized cauliflowers at the market and made this dish. You can, of course, use a larger cauliflower. If you do, I would advise that you either blanch it before marinating (to make sure it cooks through) or chop it up into smaller pieces, then marinate and then roast.

Several heads of small cauliflowers with greens removed
Spice mixes of your choice

1. Heat the oven to 450 degrees.
2. Instead of roasting the cauliflowers with a single marinade, I prepared three different ones. Each marinade had a base of olive oil, a touch of salt, some lemon juice and then one of these three prepared mixes - Ethiopian Dukkah mix, Moroccan Ras El Hanout and Indian Madras Curry.
3. Prepare the cauliflower by removing all the green parts and cut the base to remove any thick stem.
4. Place the cauliflower on an oven safe tray.

5. I used three baby cauliflower and doused each one with a different marinade. As I mentioned earlier, you can use your choice of spices here.
6. Roast for about 45 minutes.
7. Serve hot. These little gems can be one a person or half a person for a great side.

Monica's Super Easy Curried Barley Soup



Never in a million years did I think my children would ask for seconds of barley soup. They did! Take from that what you will!! This soup is topped with *sev*. *Sev* is a fried snack made with chickpea flour. It adds a nice crunch to the soup. You can purchase this at any Indian grocery store. It is an optional topping, of course, but I highly recommend it! If you don't find it, you can always use crisp wonton wafers.

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 cups chopped red onions
- 3 large garlic cloves, minced
- 1 inch piece ginger, peeled and minced
- 2 green chilies, minced (optional)
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon mild curry powder
- 12 cups (or more) vegetable broth
- 1/2 cup pearl barley (soaked overnight)
- 1 cup dried lentils
- 4 cups (packed) coarsely chopped baby spinach (or kale)

1. Heat oil in large nonreactive pot over medium-high heat.
2. When the oil shimmers, add onions and sauté until onions are golden brown, about 10 minutes.
3. Add garlic and ginger and stir 1 minute. Add the green chile, if using.
4. Mix in the cumin and the curry powder and stir 30 seconds.
5. Add the broth, barley and lentils; bring to boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for about an hour. If the broth begins to dry up, add two more cups.
6. Once the barley and the lentils are cooked, add spinach to soup; cover and simmer until spinach is tender, about 5 minutes.
7. Serve. (I don't add any salt to this soup as I don't think it needs it but, of course you can season to taste)

Easy Egg Curry



I can tell you this: if you make this recipe once, you will want to make it again and again and again. This dish is a keeper! If you are vegetarian, you can add pieces of pan-fried paneer to this dish instead of eggs. Enjoy!

- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 medium red onion, minced
- 1 1-inch piece fresh ginger root, grated
- 2 small tomatoes, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1/2 teaspoon red chili powder
- 1 teaspoon coriander powder
- Table salt to taste
- 1 cup whole milk
- 6 eggs, boiled and peeled

1. In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the red onions and sauté for about 7-8 minutes or until the onions are well browned.
2. Add the ginger and cook for another minute. Add the tomatoes, and cook until the tomatoes are done and the oil begins to separate from the onion-tomato mixture. This will take a good ten minutes. Add a bit of water if the tomatoes appear to be burning and keep on cooking.
3. Add the turmeric, red chili powder, coriander powder and salt. Mix well. Add the milk, bring to a boil. Lower heat. Cover and simmer for about 3-4 minutes.
4. Slice the eggs and gently fold into the sauce. Serve hot.

Hearty thanks to Alka at Sindi Rasoi for shooting the photograph for me!

Simply Spiced Okra



I adore okra in almost every form except when it is slimy! This dish ensures there is no slime!

1 ½ pounds okra

4 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 red onion, peeled and sliced

1 inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and thinly sliced

2 teaspoons ground cumin

1 teaspoon turmeric

1 tablespoon ground coriander

2 whole green or red Serrano peppers (optional)

Table salt to taste

Chopped, fresh cilantro for garnish

1. Wash the okra and dry it well. Cut off the stems and discard them. Slice the okra into small rounds.

2. In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onions and sauté for about 3 minutes until the onions are transparent.
3. Add the okra and ginger and sauté for about 4 minutes. Add the dry spices and peppers, if using. Mix well. Reduce the heat to medium low.
4. Continue to cook, stirring constantly, until the okra is cooked, about fifteen minutes.
5. Serve hot garnished with cilantro.

A special thanks to Reem Rizvi for this photo

Monica's Indian Express: Indian Cheese (Paneer) with Peppers



To make this simple recipe, you will need my favorite mix of spices. You can either buy the mix or make up your own. BUT BUT BUT – if you don't have some of the spices on hand, do not despair. Read on. So this recipe uses a mix called Paanch Phoron. It is a delightful mix of five spices used in equal quantity: Native to Bengal in eastern India, this five-spice mix is amazingly fragrant, flavorful and super-simple to use. First, that incredible aroma that arises when the spice mix is sizzled in hot oil: It's as if someone took maple syrup and spiced it up with dashes of toasty cumin. Why? Because one of the most aromatic parts of this mix is fenugreek, and guess what fenugreek smells like? Maple syrup, I swear. Fenugreek is the star of this mix, but the other spices play wonderfully complementary roles: The cumin's smokiness sets off the fennel seed's sweetness, while both are countered by the nigella and mustard seeds' gentle bitterness. Sounds magical, doesn't it?

You can get it here or make it : five spices — nigella, cumin, fennel, mustard seeds and fenugreek seeds — are combined in a roughly 1-1

But, what if you don't have all the spices? Despair not. You can start with any combination of whole spices you have. Just make this recipe with only cumin or only mustard seeds at first. See what you think. And then you can add the other spices as and when you purchase them!

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 ½ teaspoons paanch phoron
2 shallots, peeled and diced
2 bell peppers, seeded and cut into thin strips
¼ cup water
2 cups diced paneer (1/4 inch dice)
Table salt as needed
1 teaspoon turmeric
4 tablespoons heavy cream

1. Heat the vegetable oil in a medium skillet on medium heat. Add the paanch phoron mix. As soon as the spices sizzle, add the shallots and bell peppers. Cook for 2-3 minutes or until the shallots begin to change color.
2. Add ¼ cup water and cook until the water evaporates, 5-7 minutes.
3. Add the paneer and cook for another minute.
4. Add the turmeric and salt and mix well.
5. Stir to coat well. Continue to cook for 2-3 minutes or until the paneer is heated through. Add the heavy cream. Mix well.
6. Serve hot.

Easy Yellow Dal



This is our weeknight staple. This simple dal tastes good as a side, atop steamed rice or even thinned out as a soup. It also freezes well.

Makes 4 servings

- 1 cup yellow moong dal (split yellow mung bean)*
- 4 cups water
- 1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric*
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 small red onion, peeled and minced
- 1 teaspoon grated ginger
- 1 green serrano chili (or jalapeno), seeded and minced

- 1 small tomato, finely chopped

Salt to taste

1 tablespoon minced fresh cilantro (optional)

1. Pick through the dal and remove any debris. Rinse the dal thoroughly under running water in a fine-mesh sieve. Drain thoroughly.
2. In a deep saucepan, bring water, turmeric and 1 tablespoon of oil to a boil over high heat. Add dal. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook, uncovered, 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until dal is very soft. If the water starts to dry up, add another 1/2 cup water. Remove from heat and set aside.
3. In a medium skillet, heat the remaining 3 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat. Add cumin seeds and when they begin to sizzle, add onion. Saute for 7 to 8 minutes, until onions are well browned.
4. Add ginger, chilies and tomato. Cook, stirring occasionally, for another 8 minutes or until tomato is soft.
5. Add salt to taste and cilantro and mix well. Add onion mixture to the dal and mix well. Reheat the dal gently and serve hot.

*Available at Indian grocery stores

Photo was taken by the lovely Reem Rizvi of SimplyReem.com. Very grateful to her for her help.

Chicken Vadouvan Curry



Last year, this time, I was in Paris. Ah! The wonderful memories of that time will last me a lifetime.

I purchased this lovely Indian spice mix, Vadouvan, that the French have created. The little bit of history that I know tells me that the French were in India for while (in the south) and perhaps that explains their creation of this mix which seems to reflect southern Indian flavors. There are many different types available and you will have to experiment with which one you love the most. I used the spice mix to create a curry. I tried to play up the flavors in the mix by using onions, shallots and curry leaves. Do you like my style of TV dinner? I served the curry with steamed broccoli and some fresh rolls. I used this one: Thiercelin Vadouvan masala

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 tablespoon vadouvan masala (this will vary depending upon the strength of your mix)

2 garlic cloves, peeled and minced

10 curry leaves

1 medium red onion, peeled and thinly sliced

1 pound chicken pieces

1 cup broth

Salt to taste

1. Heat the vegetable oil in a medium pan. Add the vadouvan masala, the garlic cloves and curry leaves. Saute for 30 seconds or until aromatic.
2. Add the onions and cook for about 7-8 minutes or until the onions are soft and change color to a lovely golden brown.
3. Add the chicken and season with salt. Cook for about two to three minutes on each side.
4. Now add a cup of broth. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low. Cover and cook until the chicken is fully cooked (about ten minutes or so).
5. You can serve it as is or you can add a cup of coconut milk and simmer for a few minutes and then serve.
6. Enjoy!

Spicy Cheese Sandwich



I grew up eating Indian chili-cheese toast, which is the mother recipe for the one presented here. My mom used to toast bread, place a spiced cheese filling on top, broil it, and serve it with tomato ketchup. Comfort never tasted so good! I love making this with paneer, but my kids prefer the ooey gooey nature of cheese that melts. You can pick what you like!!

Variations: If you don't have time to steam the bell peppers, leave them out. You can use thin slices of grilled paneer instead of scrambling it. You can add chopped sun-dried tomatoes.

- 2 small bell peppers, any color
- 4 tablespoons butter, softened
- 8 slices (3/4-inch-thick) good sandwich bread
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 green serrano chile, seeded and minced
- 2 tablespoons minced shallots
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
- 1 1/2 cups grated paneer or mild cheddar (see note)
- Salt and pepper

1. Roast the bell peppers directly over the gas flame of a stove, on a grill, or under the broiler, turning occasionally until charred all over, about 10 minutes. Transfer

the peppers to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let steam for 5 minutes. Rub off the skin and seed the peppers. Cut them into strips.

2. Butter one side of each slice of bread. Flip the slices over onto a piece of parchment or waxed paper, so the unbuttered side is on top.
3. In a large pan, heat the oil on medium heat. Add the chile, shallot, and garlic and cook for about a minute, until they begin to soften and gain a little color.
4. Transfer to a bowl and thoroughly stir in the cheese. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
5. Heat a griddle or large, flat skillet over medium heat. (Don't let it get too hot or the bread will brown before cheese is soft or melted.)
6. Mound the cheese equally on four slices of bread. Add a few slices of the roasted pepper to each mound. Place the remaining bread on top, buttered side up.
7. Place the sandwiches on the griddle. Do not crowd; if you can only fit one or two sandwiches at a time, cook them in batches and serve as soon as they're done.
8. When the bread is golden brown underneath, turn sandwiches over with a spatula and press flat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and continue cooking until the bread is golden brown on both sides. Slice in half and serve hot.
9. Note: You can buy Nanak brand paneer at just about any Indian grocer. If you can't find it, but want to use a cheese that won't melt, look for queso de freir with the Latin dairy products in your supermarket. If you prefer the melting, ooey, gooey sandwiches, use any mild cheddar. My mom used to make these with grated Amul-brand Indian cheese (again, easily available at any Indian grocer.)

(MANY thanks to Alka from Sindhi Rasoi for letting me use this photo!)

Potatoes with Green Beans



I think this is one of the easiest dishes in the world to make and it is so good for you. Don't have beans? Use frozen peas. Hate potatoes? Use carrots and peas instead. Out of carrots, dice up some zucchini. This is one of the most flexible recipes I make. You can literally add your choice of vegetables here. The spicing is mild. You can add up the heat or tone it down. This is your recipe... do with it what you must!

4 large potatoes, peeled and cut into slim wedges

2 cups green beans (if using frozen, use as is. If using fresh, increase cooking time by 5 minutes or so)

2 tablespoons oil

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

1 tablespoon minced ginger

1 teaspoon turmeric

1/2 teaspoon cayenne

1 tablespoon coriander seeds, pounded (use a spice grinder or mortar and pestle to crush them)

Salt to taste

Garnish – cilantro

1. Heat the vegetable oil on medium heat. Add the cumin seeds until they sizzle. Add the ginger and saute for 30 seconds.
2. Add the potatoes and green beans. Cook for about 5 minutes or until the potatoes begin to lightly brown. Add all the dried spices. Mix well.
3. Cover and lower heat to low heat. Cook for about 15 minutes or until the potatoes are fork tender.
4. Done! Garnish with cilantro!

Hearty thanks to Alka at Sindi Rasoi for shooting the photograph for me

Sriracha Spiked Roasted cauliflower, carrot and baby pea soup

I make this soup and freeze it in small portions. It is just a perfect starter for a meal.

1 small head of cauliflower, separated into small florets, discard green parts and hard stem

2 small carrots, peeled and diced

1 small yellow onion, peeled and diced

Olive oil, as needed

Curry powder (about 2 tablespoons or as needed)

Salt is option

For the soup:

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 teaspoon grated ginger

4 cups broth (divided 2 + 2) (preferably home-made)

2 bay leaves

1 cup frozen baby peas

Sriracha or chili oil for garnish

1. Heat the oven to 400 degrees.
2. Place the cauliflower, carrots and onions on an ovenproof tray. Season with olive oil and spices (your choice.. see note above)
3. Roast for about 45 minutes or until really tender.
4. Remove from heat and allow to cool to room temperature.

When ready to prepare the soup:

1. In a deep pan, heat the olive oil. When it begins to shimmer, add the ginger. Cook for a minute or until the ginger begins to change color.
2. Add two cups of the broth, the bay leaves and the peas and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and set to simmer.

3. While the broth is simmering, puree the cauliflower mix along with the remaining two cups of broth. Use water if you need to (if the broth is not enough).
4. Add the pureed cauliflower back into the simmering pea broth.
5. Check for seasoning.
6. Add more broth if you want your soup thinner.
7. Bring to a gentle boil, remove from heat. Drizzle Sriracha or a chile oil and serve hot.

Peanut Cucumber Salad



This is a must at our home at least once a week! It is a crunchy salad that can be a side for dinner. I often just eat this at lunch!

- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 cup peanuts, roughly chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon red chili powder or cayenne or paprika
- Salt to taste
- 1 small red onion, peeled and diced
- 1 small tomato, diced
- 1 medium cucumber, peeled and diced
- A few small red radish, diced
- 1 small carrot, peeled and diced

1. In a large salad bowl, add the red onion, tomato, cucumber, radish and carrots. In a separate bowl combine the juice, peanuts and red chili and salt to taste. Pour over the salad and toss well. Chill for about 20 minutes. Serve chilled topped with the cilantro.
2. Variations: when in season, i add pomegranate arils to the salad. Also play with the ingredients: jicama works well in this salad as well as pineapple to add some sweetness. I dont add pears or apples unless I am serving it immediately or they will brown. Another fav — add a few thinly sliced fennel!
3. Now, if you are really in the mood, leave out the lemon juice and use a half a cup of yogurt instead. And season it with freshly toasted ground cumin. You will love it. Trust me.

Hearty thanks to Alka at Sindi Rasoi for shooting the photograph for me!

Eggplant with green chilies and basil



For this dish, use the long and slim Japanese eggplants. The other varieties are just too thick for this dish unless you dice them really small.

3 long Japanese eggplants

3-4 garlic cloves

1 tablespoon cornstarch

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

Salt and pepper to taste

1/4 teaspoon turmeric

10-12 basil leaves

2-3 green chilies, sliced (remove the seeds and the ribs of the chile if you don't want the heat)

1. Dice the Japanese eggplants (do not use any other variety for this). Keep skin on and try to dice them as small as you can get them
2. Peel and slice the garlic cloves

3. Place the diced eggplants on a paper napkin. Dust them with corn starch. Leave for about 20 minutes. Now press down with another paper napkin to absorb any moisture.
4. In a large, flat pan heat the oil. Add the garlic and eggplant. Cook, stirring often for about 8 minutes. The eggplant should be well-cooked by now. The pieces should be soft but will keep their shape.
5. Season with salt, black pepper and ground turmeric.
6. Using your hands tear up 10-12 basil leaves.
7. Add the basil leaves and sliced green chilies. Cook for just a minute.
8. Remove from heat. Serve!!

Photo by the very talented Reem Rizvi of Simplyreem.com

Rice with corn



This is a staple dinner side dish at our house. Serve it with your favorite curry. You can use any leftover rice to make a quick stir-fry by adding vegetables and cooked meats of your choice. Season with soy sauce and a touch of chili sauce. For the cooked corn you can cut kernels off roasted, steamed or boiled ears, or use well-drained canned corn or thawed frozen kernels. (One medium ear yields 1 to 1 1/4 cup kernels.)

Makes 4 servings

1 cup basmati rice

1 1/2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

4 whole cloves

1-inch stick cinnamon, lightly crushed

1 small bay leaf

1 cup cooked corn kernels

1/2 cup diced carrots

Pinch of salt

2 cups water

2 tablespoons fried onions (optional) (from a can or freshly made)

1. Rinse the rice 3 or 4 times under cold running water to remove excess surface starch. Set aside to drain thoroughly.
2. In a deep pan, heat the vegetable oil over medium heat. Add the cumin, cloves, cinnamon and bay leaf. When the spices begin to sizzle, add the corn and carrots. Saute for a minute. Add salt and the rice. Mix well to coat the rice with the oil.
3. Add the water and stir for a minute. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover and cook at a simmer for 12 to 15 minutes, until the water has all been absorbed. You will see small craters forming on top of the rice.
4. Remove from the heat and let the rice sit for about 5 minutes. Fluff with a fork and remove the bay leaf before serving. Top with the fried onions, if using.

Photo taken by photographer and Indian cuisine expert: Sala Kannan

Modern Spice

If you have enjoyed this dishes, you will love the dishes in my book Modern Spice – [You can buy it here.](#)



About the Author



I am an engineer turned food/travel/parenting writer based out of Washington DC. I have been published in many major national and international publications, including *Food & Wine*, *The New York Times*, *Parents*, *Cooking Light*, *Prevention*, *AARP-The magazine*, *Health*, *SELF*, *Bon Appetit*, *Saveur*, and many more. I wrote a weekly syndicated for Scripps Howard Media, for a year, called *Seasonings*, and am a frequent contributor to *NPR's Kitchen Window*.

My work has garnered numerous accolades, including my food essays being included in *Best Food Writing* anthologies (2005, 2009 and 2010). I have published three cookbooks, the latest being: *Modern Spice: Inspired Indian recipes for the contemporary Kitchen* (Simon & Schuster, 2009, which Padma Lakshmi called her personal - "BESTS.BOOK.EVER" in Newsweek. I also have a spice app for Apple products. In 2012, *The Chicago Tribune* picked me as one of seven note-worthy food writers to watch.. (http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-04-18/site/ct-prj-0401-food-writers-20120418-24_1_food-bloggers-food-writers-lisa-ekus).

And *Mashable* recently picked me as one of the top 10 food writers on Twitter.

I am a frequent speaker at the Smithsonian and my most recent workshops for them have included a full day seminar on social media for personal branding.

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Monica Bhide

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