

Recipe Packet: Indian Cooking for Beginners

Vegetable Pakoras

Serves 4 – 6

1 medium onion, peeled, halved and lyonnaise sliced
1 zucchini, grated (use the large holes)
1 carrot, grated (use the large holes)
1 small bell pepper (red or green), julienned
1 small jalapeno, seeded and minced
3 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
2 ½ cups chick pea flour
¼ cup rice flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
1 tablespoon ground turmeric
pinch cayenne pepper
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
½ teaspoon ground cumin
1 ½ teaspoon kosher salt
1 ½ - 2 cups water (divided)
1 quart canola oil (for frying)
2 tablespoons sea salt (for garnish)
2 tablespoons chopped cilantro (for garnish)
6 lime wedges (for garnish)

In a mixing bowl, combine the onion, zucchini, carrot, bell pepper and jalapeno together.

In another mixing bowl, stir together the chickpea flour, rice flour, baking soda, turmeric, cardamom, cumin, garlic and salt. Slowly add the water and whisk to combine. Add more water if needed – the mixture should resemble pancake batter. Set aside.

Pour the oil into a wide, shallow skillet or sauté pan to shallow fry the pakoras. Heat over medium high heat until it begins to shimmer. You can test the oil by inserting a wooden spoon or chopstick – if the oil starts to fry and bubble around the wood, the oil is at the proper temperature.

Add the vegetables into the batter and fold to combine. Use a large tablespoon to scoop the mixture and use another spoon to carefully push the mixture into the hot oil. Be careful not to splash the hot oil. Make sure the pakoras do not touch in the oil – they may stick together.

Fry for 5 to 6 minutes, making sure to flip them if they are still pale on top. Use a skimmer to scoop the pakoras out of the oil and drain on a cooling rack set over a sheetpan to catch the oil. Sprinkle with sea salt and serve immediately with cilantro and lime.

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Chicken Tikka Masala

Serves 4

1 pound chicken breasts, boneless skinless and cut into 16 pieces

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

½ cup plain yogurt

1 tablespoon garlic, peeled and minced

1 tablespoon ginger, peeled and minced

Juice of one lemon

2 tablespoons clarified butter, or ghee (or use coconut oil)

½ yellow onion, chopped

2 tablespoons ginger, minced

4 cloves garlic, minced

1 tablespoon ground coriander

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 tablespoon paprika

½ teaspoons cayenne pepper

1 teaspoon ground cardamom

½ teaspoon ground nutmeg

15 oz can tomato puree

14 oz can coconut milk

Salt and pepper, to taste

Dried ghost chiles (to taste - optional!)

Chopped cilantro, for garnish

In a mixing bowl, season the chicken with salt and pepper and let it sit for 10 minutes. Add the yogurt, garlic, ginger, and lemon juice to the chicken and stir to combine. Let the chicken marinate for 2 hours, or covered overnight in the fridge.

In a Dutch oven over medium heat, add the ghee or coconut oil and sauté the onion until translucent, about 7-8 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and continue to cook until the onions are deeply caramelized, about 25 minutes. Add the garlic and ginger and sauté until the garlic is fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add in the spices and continue to cook until the spices are fragrant, another 40 seconds.

While the onions are caramelizing, heat up another pan and add another 2 tablespoons of ghee or coconut oil. Brown the chicken and remove from the pan to a clean plate.

Add the chicken to the onions and spices. Add the tomato puree and coconut milk. Season with salt and pepper and stir to combine. Cover and simmer for 40 minutes or until the chicken is tender.

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Taste and adjust the seasoning with more salt and pepper (and lemon juice) if necessary. Shave in some dried ghost chiles if desired.

Serve hot with plenty of chopped cilantro over basmati rice.

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Saffron-Studded Basmati Rice

Serves 4-6

Ever since I was a child, the steamed rice served at Indian restaurants has mesmerized me. It was so fluffy, so soft and flecked with brilliant red-orange rice grains. In my childish imagination, I thought they were marigold petals plucked and added to the rice.

1 generous pinch of saffron threads
3 tablespoons butter
pinch of kosher salt
3 cups basmati rice
4 ½ cups boiling water

Wash the basmati rice 4 times, rinsing clean each time. Soak the rice in cold water and sprinkle a pinch of salt over. It's best to soak the rice for at least an hour, or up to 4 hours. Just before you are ready to cook, drain the rice and allow it to dry out for 10 minutes. After soaking, basmati rice is very delicate and fragile so during cooking, stir gently!

With a mortar and pestle, grind a generous pinch of saffron and add 2 tablespoons of hot water to the saffron and let it steep for about 30 minutes.

In a large shallow pan (or dutch oven), melt the butter over medium heat and gently sauté the rice until all the grains are coated. Add a couple of generous pinches of salt and stir again (gently).

Turn the heat down the lowest setting it can go and add the water to the rice. Stir only once and shake the pan gently to make sure the rice is spread out evenly in the water. Cover tightly and keep on the low heat for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, the water should be completely absorbed and the rice should be fluffy and white. If not, turn the heat up very slightly and leave until done.

Pour the saffron infusion into 3-4 points in the rice and cover. Leave the rice alone for 10 minutes.

When ready to serve, use a fork to gently fluff the rice and watch the golden flecks from the saffron infusion work its way through. Gently pour the rice over a serving platter, not a bowl, as the weight of the rice might mash the bottom layer.