

THE FEARLESS OLIVE
BY REEMA ISLAM



Going healthy with strawberries

RED DELIGHTS

Every street corner and every market is again lined with red, scrumptious delights. Strawberries are back, and though this fruit was not to be seen in Bangladesh even a decade back, start of cultivation has brought it to the market in the last few years. Strawberries are now cultivated in parts of Bangladesh including Rajshahi and Dinajpur. This exotic fruit that we grew up drooling over is now available – cultivated locally and at a price that does not leave a dent on the wallet. Locally cultivated strawberries cost around Tk 80 to Tk 130. The season for strawberries started a few weeks ago. Sold in clear plastic boxes, they are available in most local markets and are even sold by street vendors at Farmgate, Dhanmondi and many other places So this is the perfect time to indulge – as vendors say that the season doesn't last for long.

Strawberries are perfect for preparation of a wide range of dishes. From desserts and smoothies – the possibilities are endless. As toppings for cakes, just dipped in chocolate or just eaten as is – strawberries are healthy and tasty – and since availability is no longer a factor, what are you waiting for?

"Let me take you down, 'cause I'm going to strawberry fields nothing is real and nothing to get hung about strawberry fields are forever..."

John Lennon wrote this famous song, which was an ode to his friendship with Paul McCartney, referring to the Salvation Army home Lennon was in as a child, called the Strawberry Field. Ancient Italians are thought to have consumed strawberries as it was a symbol of the goddess Venus and Roman literature bears its references. During Napoleon's era in France, a certain Madame Tallien was famous for bathing in the juice of up to 22 pounds of fresh strawberries! She certainly smelt nicer than the rest of the unwashed populace and this is also when strawberry plantations also caught on.

The Spanish had initially brought it back from the Americas and soon horticulturalists made it more common. And now in Bangladesh, Rajshahi is proving to be the hub of all plantations and farmers are sending them off by the tons to be sold everywhere. So from Mongla port to Nilphamari and Teknaf, strawberries are lighting up street vendors with their vibrancy.

Today I bring to you some off-beat recipes starting off with a breakfast for champions! I call it the 'Breakfast Pyramid' and you can use those brain neurons to guess why it is called such.

Ingredients:

150g or half cup flattened rice (cheera)
Half cup yoghurt
Assorted fruits: papaya, black grapes or black raisins, bananas and strawberries (about 200 grams each)
Mint leaves (handful) , 8-10 caramelised cashews

Method:

Take about ten cashews, unsalted and put them in a pan with 1 tablespoon brown sugar and quickly cook them for about 10 second. Then take off and let it cool. Dry roast the cheera and let it cool. In a glass bowl, tall glass or one of those jars, pile on the papaya wedges, mint leaves then strawberries cut from top to bottom, in wedges, banana slices and grapes then sprinkle some cheera and add a dollop of yoghurt. Continue till you reach top.

Serving:

Sprinkle the caramelised cashews on top and eat with a large spoon and wake up those senses.

Health focus:

With its fibre that works wonders for a bright white smile, strawberries are packed with vitamin C and K, where one gives us better immunity (so away with those spring fevers) and the other, great skin and hair. With minerals like manganese and potassium, strawberries are great pick-me-ups for those afternoon drowsy hours. Pop a few at 4pm and watch how your sleep slips off leaving you energised.

Berry healthy salad

Strawberries in a bowl that can curb those hunger pangs and leave you guilt free.

Ingredients:

250g strawberries, 250g Dhaka pomeer
4-5 jalapenos or 1 capsicum
Handful of mint leaves and spring onions
1 large sweet corn (boiled)
Virgin olive oil (half cup)



250g iceberg lettuce or cabbage leaves (cut to bite sizes)

Normal lettuce (as much as you want)

Method:

Dice all fruits and vegetables in bite sizes and place in a bowl. Sprinkle some salt and pepper on top. Then add the entire oil and mix it all up with a fork and salad tong. Let the red colours of the strawberries mix with the salad and absorb the sweet-sourness.

Serving:

Serve after 5-10 minutes to let dressing get absorbed and refrigerate later. Eat as a snack or a side dish even.

Health focus:

Strawberries are super anti-oxidants and very effective in washing away all that pollution you inhale and ingest. So chomp away and stay healthy.

Strawberry shrikand with saffron

A shrikand is basically a hung yoghurt dish with fruits and nuts in it so we can easily add strawberries to the recipe and enjoy the sweet cum sour mix of flavours.

Ingredients:

3-4 saffron strands, 4 tbsp milk, warmed
Half cup hung yoghurt (take plain yoghurt and tie it with a cotton cloth and let it hang for few hours)

1 tsp clear honey
2 tbsp powdered almonds (dry roast them then crush them)
1 cup strawberries

Method:

Place saffron in a cup with the milk warm

enough to touch and leave to soak for a couple of minutes. Whisk together the yoghurt and honey in a separate bowl. Gently stir milk and saffron into the yoghurt mixture. In a bowl, pile the strawberries then pour layer of yoghurt followed by another layer of strawberries then yoghurt.

Serving:

Top it off with a sprinkling of the almond crush. Serve cold.

Health focus:

Did you know that we are one of the mammals that cannot produce our own stocks of Vitamin C and so need to consume it as much as we can? One serving or about 150g of strawberries provides about 52mg of vitamin C which is half our day's requirements. So eat up folks and build that strong inner you and fight off those change of weather ills and chills!

Food prepared by Reema Islam

Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

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