

Vegetarian smash-ups

AAPPAYON

BY SHAWKAT OSMAN



MASHED BOTTLE GOURD LEAVES

Lau is a fleshy, many-seeded fruit, commonly known as the bottle gourd and is available in a great variety of forms. With the inner flesh and seeds removed from ripe gourds and then dried, the hardened rind serves as bottles, dippers, cups, and resonator of various musical instruments.

A line in the popular folk song 'Shader Lau' says that you can eat every part of the lau plant – its fruit, stem, young shoots, leaves, flowers, seeds and furthermore design a 'do-tara', a two-stringed musical instrument, out of its rind!

Beside the ek-tara, do-tara and the dugdugi (tiny drums) of the bards, the famous sitar is also made from dried lau rind. We are in awe of shader lau, a term of endearment fondly reserved for the most 'cherished' vegetable of the East Indians.

The bottle gourd is one of the oldest cultivated plants in the world. The origin of the bottle gourd is acknowledged to be Africa, although archaeological evidence has placed it in Peru around 12000 BC, in Thailand about 8000 BC, and in Zambia around 2000 BC. It has travelled widely, perhaps because the hard, dry skin of the mature fruits is impervious to water and is capable of floating on salt water for the better part of a year without any loss in seed viability.

Ingredients

1 bunch (250g) gourd leaves
10 green chillies, chopped
10 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tbsp soy bean oil

1 tsp salt

2 red onions, sliced

Method

Steam the lau leaves for 5 minutes or simmer the leaves in boiling water for 3 minutes. Drain and then chop the leaves into large segments. Reserve leaves.

Heat oil in a wok, toss in the following: onions, green chilli, and garlic. Sauté until they change colour. Chuck in the leaves. Sprinkle with salt and heat through. Transfer the leaves et al into a food processor. Grind to a fine paste and serve.

Note

To make the famous and most coveted East Indian dish 'lau shutki bharta,' roast 5 pieces of dry chapila shutki on a wok for 2 minutes, roughly grind them and add to the above bharta along with two chopped onions.

MASHED BOTTLE GOURD PEEL

A recipe for the discarded peels of bottle gourd, and is good for potol (pointed gourd) peel as well. An American nutritionist working for the ICDDR'B, during one of her village visits, informed the villagers that the peel of all gourds is very nutritious, and should not be discarded. The wide-eyed villagers listened to her with trepidation and later politely clued-up their guest that the 'very tasty' green dish she so specially relished was nothing but potol peels.



Ingredients

Peels of 1 bottle gourd
2 red onions, chopped
5 green chillies, chopped
1 tbsp garlic paste
1 tbsp mustard oil
2 tsp garlic paste
1½ tsp salt

Method

Boil the peels, cool and grind to a paste (should not be too soft, comparable to stiff mashed potato), set aside. Heat ghee in a wok, and chuck in the ginger paste and the garlic paste, and sauté until fragrant. Pour in the peel paste; stir to merge the spice with the paste. Take off the heat and cool to

beans. They are rich in nutrients, particularly protein and carbohydrates. In some places, the plant is believed to be a snake repellent.

Sword beans are edible only when they are light green in colour. When mature, they turn dark green, finally becoming dry and brown, and literally can be used as a blunt 'sword'!

Ingredients

1 kg sword beans (mou sheem)
4 red onions
2 tsp ginger
6 cups water
2 tbsp coriander
10 garlic cloves
1 cup mustard oil
10 green chillies



room temperature. To the paste now add the following: green chilli, onions, salt and mustard oil. Mix to blend in the spice with the peel paste. Serve at room temperature.

MASHED SWORD BEANS

Mousheem a.k.a. makhan sheem, or sword beans, are grown on vines and the climbing vines need a fence or strong trellis to support the weight of the vine and seedpods, which are heavy!

The pod of mou sheem is edible in the tender, immature stage. Owing to a local taboo it is not sliced and used as broad beans. Recent scientific reports have indicated the possibility of mild toxicity of sword beans when eaten in large quantities. Because of this, the boiling water should be drained off to remove any poisonous substances coming from the

1 tsp salt

Method

Chop the sword beans into 4 pieces. Boil them until they're tender, with 6 cups of water, and drain and cool. In a food processor grind the sword bean pieces into a fine paste. In a stone mortar, roughly pound the following: garlic cloves, green chilli, onions, ginger and coriander.

Combine all the pounded ingredients with the sword bean paste. Sprinkle with: mustard oil and salt. Rub with your fingers to give a final mix up.

WATER LILY CURRY

Water lilies (shapla) grow abundantly in almost all shallow natural water-bodies of East India, but are more frequent and much