

THE FEARLESS OLIVE

BY REEMA ISLAM



'Bhuribhoj' on Durga Puja

Bengali Hindu households respond to 'mayer dak' as Durga Puja arrives in all its splendour and people prepare for this autumn festival of welcoming the mother home. The festival menu is an array of some typically Bengali dishes but as usual, the Fearless Olive provides a variation to the traditional table. With sesame replacing the poppy seed, and a rare fruit making an appearance, here's to a happy homecoming and farewell to the goddess Durga. Saradiyo Shubhechha!

STUFFED AUBERGINES

The humble eggplant has been around for much longer than we realise and is found in varying colours and shapes all over the Indian subcontinent. Mentioned in the Mahabharata, its origins are thought to distinctly revolve around the region of Bengal and South India. Thus, the quintessential 'begun bhaja' on any traditional Bengali table gets a re-hashing.

Ingredients

6-8 large eggplants, halved and sprinkled with salt
2 large onions, diced
1-2 tomatoes, diced
200g Dhaka paneer
2 tbs tamarind chutney
3-4 green chillies, finely chopped
Coriander and mint leaves chopped, ½ tbsp cumin powder
A pinch of cinnamon powder
Salt to taste, Olive oil

Method

Take tamarind pulp and mix it with 2 teaspoons of molasses and add rock salt to your taste. It should not be too overpowering though. Wash the halved eggplants and empty the insides, leaving the outer skin or shells only. Make sure to leave some

pulp as the skin is thin and can tear easily. Sauté the onions in the oil until they are glazed for about 2-3 minutes, then add the eggplant mush, which should be chopped, and garlic; sauté these for another 2 minutes.

Next, add the tomatoes and cook for about 2 more minutes. At this stage, add the cinnamon and cumin powder and cover it on low heat for about 5 minutes. Once done, fill the eggplant shells with this stuffing along with the tamarind chutney. Take a baking tray and oil it well; then place the shells on them and grate the paneer on top of each shell. Stick it into the oven for about 3-4 minutes until the cheese melts and the eggplant shells appear done. You may serve the tamarind chutney as a dip instead of filling it in. Sprinkle the chopped coriander and mint leaves.

POTOL (POINTED GOURD) SESAME

Its earliest records come from an Assyrian myth, which claims that the Gods drank sesame wine the night before they created earth. So instead of the traditional potol-posto, here's a twist.

Ingredients

½ kg pointed gourds, seeded and halved
200g sesame seeds, roasted
Pinch of coriander powder, turmeric and

whole cumin

3-4 small onions, thinly sliced
1 onion beresta, for garnishing
1-2 bell peppers or jalapeños, roasted, skinned and de-seeded
½ cup split yellow peas (yellow daal), boiled
1 aamra (ambarella)



Salt to taste

Olive oil

Method

Sauté the halved pointed gourds with a pinch of salt in about ½ table spoons of oil and salt, until slightly browned and set aside. Fry the onions with the cumin until they are browned. Fry some onions to a deep brown for the garnishing. Add the turmeric and after a minute, add the coriander powder to the onions in the pan with salt and cook for another minute. Add the daal and cook for about 1 to 2 minutes. Leave on low heat and mash the de-seeded, roasted bell peppers without the skin. Add this pulp to the mix and stuff the pointed gourds with this. Make a watery paste of the roasted sesame. To serve, grate the aamra on top and sprinkle the beresta. Swirl the sesame paste on top and on the sides so people can use it as a dip as well.

CUSTARD APPLE KHEER

The 'ata fol' gets its name from the far off

lands of Mexico, where it was known as 'ate' and Spanish traders to the Philippines mainly brought it into Asia. High in manganese and Vitamin C, this pulpy fruit makes a rare appearance in today's dessert.

Ingredients

1 litre milk
1 tbsp brown sugar
1 tsp cardamom powder
2-3 custard apples
Almond and pistachios, sliced for garnishing
Dried tulsi or basil leaves for garnishing

Method

Heat the milk and bring to a boil. Let it simmer till it thickens and is reduced to about half. Add the sugar and cardamom, and let it simmer for another 4 to 5 minutes. It should be considerably thick now so remove from the fire and set aside to cool. Once cooled, add the peeled and seeded custard apple pulp to it. Mix this and refrigerate. Serve chilled with a garnishing of the nuts and basil leaves, which will add a subtle flavour.

