



SPECIAL FEATURE

Taking danger out of the kitchen

Growing up in Dhaka, or in any other part of Bangladesh for that matter, we have always seen our mothers and grandmothers cook up diverse delicious dishes rich in spices each telling an age-old different story. However, cooking can be surprisingly dangerous, considering that a kitchen is equipped with sharp knives, hot exposed surfaces, pots of boiling water and pans of sizzling grease. So how can we make things easier for the ones who are newbies taking a fancy to cooking? How can we take the danger out of making dinner?

KNIVES AND SCISSORS ALL THE WAY!

Even the most modern fans of the Bangladeshi cuisine have not been able to come up with tactics for the various activities that go on in the kitchen. Very prevalent in our households are 'botis' (a large curved blade) which are used for cutting things, starting from something as small as fingerling fishes to large pumpkins and beef. This traditional but complex system for cutting veggies is rather dangerous as it often results in the user getting a nasty cut or other unwanted accidents.

Botis are comfortable to use for the people who are accustomed to it but often can cause your toes to get badly cut. A smarter way to replace these is using sharp and well-designed knives or even scissors.

Scissors come in various shapes and sizes with varying degrees of sharpness depending on their intended use. They also come in various bright colours. Add these to your to-buy list and accessorise your kitchen to give it a modern and chic look.

If scissors do not seem to be your choice, you can always opt for knives. Make sure to keep these sharp objects clean and sanitised and boxed properly to avoid any hazards.

CLEAN UP QUICKLY

When you are preparing dinner while nagging teens or tugging toddlers are begging for their evening meal, it is easy to spill a thing or two. Make sure you clean it up as quickly and efficiently as possible to avoid any sort of slipping hazards.

Grease and oil, slippery peelings of various fruits and vegetables prove to be especially dangerous and has resulted in odd slipping accidents.

SEE PAGE 20

Dried herbs and spice mixes

Novice or pro, you cannot even begin to cook unless your pantry is stocked with essential dried herbs and spices. While you may be well aware that cinnamon and cardamom can go into both savoury and sweet dishes, this is only the beginning of your cooking journey! Follow our list of herbs and spice mixes to check how far long you have come on your path to mastering cooking.

Asafoetida (or hing) - used as a digestive aid in Indian cooking. Asafoetida has a strong odour that mellows out into a garlic-onion flavour.

Basil - highly aromatic with a robust liquorice flavour. Excellent in pestos, as a finishing touch on pasta dishes, or stuffed into sandwiches. A spicy, edgier cousin to this is *Thai basil*, which is a must-have for Thai stir-fries, Vietnamese Pho, spring rolls, and other South Asian dishes.

Bay leaf - adds a woody background note to soups and sauces.

Caraway seed - these anise-tasting seeds are essential for soda bread.

Coriander seed - earthy, lemony flavour. Used in a lot of Mexican and Indian dishes.

Cumin - smoky and earthy, used in Mexican cuisine, as well as North African, Middle Eastern, and Indian ones.

Curry leaves - these pungent leaves are not related to curry powder, but impart a similar flavour. Mainly used in Indian, Malaysian, Sri Lankan, Singaporean, and Pakistani cuisine, the leaves are used to flavour curries, soups, stews, and chutneys.

Fennel seed - lightly sweet and liquorice flavoured. It's excellent with meat dishes, or even chewed on its own as a breath freshener and digestion aid!

Fenugreek - although this herb smells like maple syrup while cooking, it has a rather bitter, burnt sugar flavour. Found in a lot of Indian and Middle Eastern dishes.

Kaffir lime leaves - used to flavour curries and many Thai dishes as well as South Indian dishes. Can be found fresh, dry, or frozen.

Loomi - also called black lime, this is ground from dried limes. Adds a sour kick to many Middle Eastern dishes.

Mace and nutmeg - mace is the spice made from the reddish seed covering of the nutmeg seed, but tastes more subtle and delicate. Mace is great in savoury dishes, especially stews and homemade meat dishes. Nutmeg is sweet and pungent, and works well in baked goods, but also adds a warm note to savoury dishes.

Mahlab - ground from sour cherry pits, this spice has a nutty and somewhat sour flavour. It is used in a lot of sweet breads throughout the Middle East.

Oregano - robust, with somewhat lemony flavour. Used in a lot of Mexican and Mediterranean dishes and can be used as an added kick to local tomato, egg and potato dishes as seasoning.

Paprika - adds a sweet note and a red colour. Used in stews and spice blends.

There is also a spicy version labelled *hot paprika*. The smoked version adds sweet smokiness to dishes.

Rosemary - great with eggs, beans, and potatoes, as well as grilled meats as it adds a mustard like flavour.

Saffron - has a subtle but distinct floral flavour and aroma, and it also gives foods a bright yellow colour.

Sage - pine-like flavour, with more lemony and eucalyptus notes than rosemary. Found in a lot of northern Italian cooking.

Star anise - whole star anise can be used to add a sweet liquorice flavour to sauces and soups.

Sumac - zingy and lemony, sumac is a Middle Eastern spice that's great in marinades and spice rubs.

Turmeric - sometimes used more for its yellow colour than its flavour, turmeric has a mild woody flavour. Can be used in place of saffron in a pinch or for those of us on a budget.

Thyme - adds a pungent, woody flavour. Great as an all-purpose seasoning.

A variant, lemon thyme adds a sweet lemon aroma, and a fresh lemony-herbal flavour. This is excellent with poultry and in vinaigrettes.

Making mixes

Herbs used on their own or as part of mixed spice rubs are also part and parcel of great cooking. You can even add what you have at hand to make spice mixes from around the world!

Berberé - an essential from Ethiopia, this includes hot peppers, black pepper, fenugreek, ginger, cardamom, coriander, cinnamon, and cloves. Other ingredients may include ajwain, cumin, allspice, nutmeg, paprika, onion, or garlic. Used to flavour slow-cooked stews.

Bouquet Garni - a classic French specialty where the herbs are tied together, includes thyme, parsley, and bay leaf. Can be used to flavour broths and soups.

Chinese five-spice powder - adds sweetness and depth to savoury Chinese style dishes, especially beef and duck.

Made with star anise, Szechuan peppercorns, fennel, cassia, and clove.

Dukkah - an Egyptian condiment made with nuts (most often hazelnuts, but can be made with other nuts as well), sesame seeds, coriander, and cumin. Also works as a great spice rub for lamb, chicken, and fish.

Pumpkin pie spice mix - made with cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and cloves. Used for seasoning pumpkin pie, but also great in other spiced baked goods.

Ras el Hanout - hailing from Morocco, this mix has cardamom, clove, cinnamon, paprika, coriander, cumin, mace, nutmeg, peppercorn, and turmeric. Can be used as a spice rub on meat or as a simple condiment.

Compiled

