



# Feasts of devotion: Durga Puja at home

Growing up Durga Puja always felt like a much-dreaded annual feat. I would usually start pacing myself for the last four days that a younger hormonal me would sum in three words, "heat, traffic and gatherings". I never really understood what all the fuss and excitement was about, but with time those feelings and perceptions changed. The only thing that remained static through out all those years of angst and still does is the excitement of coming back home to the spread on the dining table that still gives me a warm fuzzy feeling to this day.

All my cousins, friends and I around the dining table, ever grateful to finally give those sore feet a break, the cooler temperatures indoors and the sudden realization that we hadn't had a proper meal the entire day. In most Bengali Hindu homes, it is customary to consume mostly vegetarian dishes during Durga Puja, so there usually is a lot of khichuri and an assortment of decadent vegetable curries and a deep-fried golden version of some vegetable. Salivating already?

The last day of Durga Puja, also known as "Bijoya Dashami" is the epitome, marked by the immersion of the idol of Goddess Durga into the river or pond. Dinner that night could easily sum up the gusto with which people partake in the daytime celebration of "Bishorjon" and "ShidurKhela".

This is also the day when homes are filled with the aromas of "pulao, kosha mangsho" and the must-have "ilishbhaja". Most Bengali Hindus take their "ilish" very seriously on this day because after Durga Puja, Hilsa is not generally consumed until Saraswati Puja to allow breeding time for the fish. Surely with modern times and better storage facilities that is not necessarily always the case now.

It never felt like an inconvenience to eat only vegetables for the last four straight days, especially when the dishes on its own were just as extravagant and rich like the celebrations themselves, building up to the final act!

Sharodiyo Shubechha to all the readers and Happy Feasting this Durga Puja!

A special thanks to Ratna Sen a.k.a Kiki and her husband Dr. Samanta Lal Sen for opening up her home, the hard work and time she put into preparing all the scrumptious and wonderful dishes and also for sharing her recipes.

## VEGETABLE BATTER FRY

### Ingredients

2/3 cup maida (refined flour)  
1/3 cup corn flour, 1 tsp rice flour  
1/2 tsp turmeric powder  
1/3 tsp cooking soda  
Salt and sugar, to taste, 1 cup oil  
Sliced potato, brinjal and pumpkin or

any other combination of vegetables

### Method

Wash the sliced vegetables and add salt and sugar to them and keep aside. In a bowl, add maida, corn flour, rice flour, turmeric powder, cooking soda and salt and mix well. Add water to make a batter thick enough to coat the vegetables and set aside. Heat oil in a wok. Drain the vegetables of the salt and sugar water. Dip in batter and deep fry.

## LABRA (MIXED VEGETABLES)

### Ingredients

1/2 tsp turmeric powder  
1/3 tsp chili powder  
1/2 tsp cumin powder (jeera)  
1/3 tsp coriander powder  
1/4 tsp asafoetida (Hing), optional  
3/4 tsp panch phoron  
4 green chillies, split  
1/2 tsp wheat flour (atta)  
1 tsp ghee, 2 tbsp oil  
6 daaler bori (optional)

Vegetables such as potato, pumpkin, brinjal, radish, cauliflower, cabbage, bean and whatever else you have available in the refrigerator



### Method

Heat oil in wok. If you add daaler bori, fry first and keep aside. Temper oil with two slit green chillies and paanch phoron. Add the cut vegetables and the turmeric, chilli, cumin, asafoetida and coriander powder and salt and sugar. Fry till the raw flavour is gone and a fried smell prevails. Then add water and cook till it is completely absorbed and the vegetables are cooked. When done, add the bori, remaining green chillies, ghee and wheat flour and mix. Cover to allow standing time and serve.

## CREAM PANEER (COTTAGE CHEESE)

### Ingredients

250g paneer, cut into small cubes