

DESHI MIX

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A paan you cannot do without



The betel leaf has a long standing history with our culture. One simply cannot forget the image of elderly grandmothers, their lips reddened by the betel leaf, always chewed while narrating stories on winter evenings.

The paan is said to signify freshness and prosperity, and it is no surprise that paan is an integral part of all celebrations, especially the Bengali wedding.

From the first time a family meets to discuss marriage, an exchange of sweets is a must, followed by the presentation of a wonder array of betel leaves, neatly arranged on a plate.

And that is only the beginning. No matter how many events follow, paan accompanies.

With the wedding season in mind, I would like to present some of the popular ways of making, and serving paan. Some traditional, others somewhat out of the box. Here is paan in all its glory.

CHOCOLATE PAAN (BETEL LEAF WITH CHOCOLATE)

Ingredients

8 betel leaves (paan)
200g dark chocolate, grated
½ tsp lime paste/edible calcium carbonate (chun)
2 tbsp fresh cream, 2 tbsp fennel seeds
1 tsp catechu(khayer)

Method

Halve the paans lengthwise. Apply a little chun and catechu on each piece of paan. Mix the two and spread all over. Melt dark chocolate in a bowl in the microwave oven, one minute. Take the bowl out and whisk

the chocolate till smooth.

Divide into two portions.

To one add fennel seeds and mix. Add little cream and mix.

Melt the second portion of chocolate for fifteen seconds and whisk. Shape each paan piece into a cone and stuff with the chocolate-fennel mixture. Dip them in the melted chocolate and place on a plate. Chill in the refrigerator till the chocolate sets. Serve chilled.

MISHTY PAAN

Ingredients

4 betel leaves
1 tsp catechu
1 tsp lime paste/edible calcium carbonate (chun)
10g fennel seeds (you can use sugar coated



seeds for added flavour)

4 pieces cardamom, 2 tsp tutti-frutti
2 tsp grated coconut, 4-5 dry cherry
1 tsp betel nuts, finely chopped
4 toothpicks, to hold the wrapped paan
Gulkand or rose preserve, as needed

Method

Wash betel leaves and wipe them carefully

to not tear them. Cut the stem from leaf. Keep the leaf on plate or cloth and apply chun on the back of betel leaf. Now sprinkle catechu on top of this. Add gulkand on top of it. Add betel nuts, tutti-frutti, fennel seeds, coconut, and cardamom on the leaf. Top it up with cherry. Wrap the paan and close it using a toothpick. Paan is ready to be enjoyed.

DRY FRUITS AND HONEY PAAN

Ingredients

4 betel leaves
1 tbsp honey
2 tbsp mix dry fruits
4 cardamom pods
4 tbsp gulkand or rose preserve
10 golden raisins
4 cloves

Method

Thoroughly wash the betel leaf under running water and turn it upside down on a flat surface. Slightly trim the leaf at the end to ensure that only soft part is used and the paan can be sealed easily later.

Spread around a few drops of honey. Add roasted fennel seeds. Add a cardamom pod, a couple of raisins and mixed nuts. Evenly spread coconut powder on top of all the ingredients.

Now the best bit, drop a liberal dose of gulkand in the middle. Wrap the leaf and close it using a toothpick, and serve.



BAN ARASI PAAN

Ingredients

To be mixed together

—

4 tsp small fennel seeds
2 tsp betel nut slivers
2 tsp coloured sugar coated
½ tsp cardamom powder
½ tsp nutmeg powder
¼ tsp cinnamon powder
1 tsp grated dry coconut, 2 tbsp tutti-frutti
¼ tsp menthol powder

Other ingredients —

8 betel leaves (paan)
½ tsp lime paste

Method

Wash the betel and wipe them. Put a pinch of slaked lime paste on the wiped betel leaves and keep aside. Put two leaves one over the other. Place one teaspoon of the prepared mixture. Fold to a triangle and seal with a toothpick, repeat for making three more leaves. Serve after a heavy meal.

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed