

IN SEARCH OF COMFORT FOOD

BY SOBIA AMEEN



Fruity goodies

MASALA CHAI AND PEAR CAKE

As 'masala chai' has recently found its deserved fame around the world, it has always been a staple flavour of the deshi household. In this recipe, the masala chai allows the cake to not be overly sweet and the pear has this delicious poached texture that balances the flavours of the cake.

This works great with a cup of tea or coffee in the evening.

Ingredients

(Use a grinder to combine the spices into a powder)

- 1 tsp dried ginger powder
- ½ tsp green cardamom seeds
- ¼ tsp black peppercorns
- 2 cloves
- ½-inch cinnamon stick
- ¼ tsp star anise
- 1 cup water
- 4 tbsp black tea leaves
- ¾ cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 4 large eggs
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 2 large pears, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup plain yoghurt



Parchment paper

Method

Preheat the oven to 160° C and start by preparing the tea.

In a small saucepan, bring a cup of water to a boil over medium heat, and add the tea leaves.

Wait for 5 minutes for the tea to release the juice; now strain.

Discard the tea leaves. In a clean saucepan, reduce the tea until it is approximately ¼ cup. Once the tea has reduced, set aside to cool.

Line a round 9-inch cake pan or 2 separate 6-inch cake pans (for layers) with parchment paper, and grease the sides of the tin/s evenly. Keep this ready to pour the batter in.

Mix all the dry ingredients together in a clean bowl; freshly ground masala chai spices, flour and baking powder.



Using the paddle attachment, cream the butter and sugar for about 5 minutes on medium speed; add the white of one egg at a time to the butter and sugar — make sure the consistency is smooth and creamy.

Add the tea and beat again. Slowly add the mixture of dry ingredients and half way through the dry ingredients, add the yoghurt, keep beating, and add the remaining dry ingredients.

Once the batter is smooth and creamy, fold the pears in with a spatula or wooden spoon, do not beat once the pears have been added as they get bruised and lose the firm shape.

Pour the batter into the pan/s prepared earlier and gently bang on the kitchen counter to get rid of any air bubbles and

level the batter.

Put into the preheated oven, it should take around 50-60 minutes to fully bake. Check by pricking the centre of the cake with a fork, or toothpick, if it comes out clean, the cake is ready.

Wait for the cake/s to cool before taking it out of the tins. It can be sprinkled with icing sugar or iced with vanilla or rose buttercream.

BEETROOT HALWA WITH KHOYA

Halwa is often made with semolina during Ramadan and Eid, but as beetroot is available in abundance this season, it can work as an excellent dessert to end the meal.

Traditionally, to make khoya is a very time consuming process, so consider this as the instant version that is used as a topping to complement the halwa.

Ingredients

For the halwa —

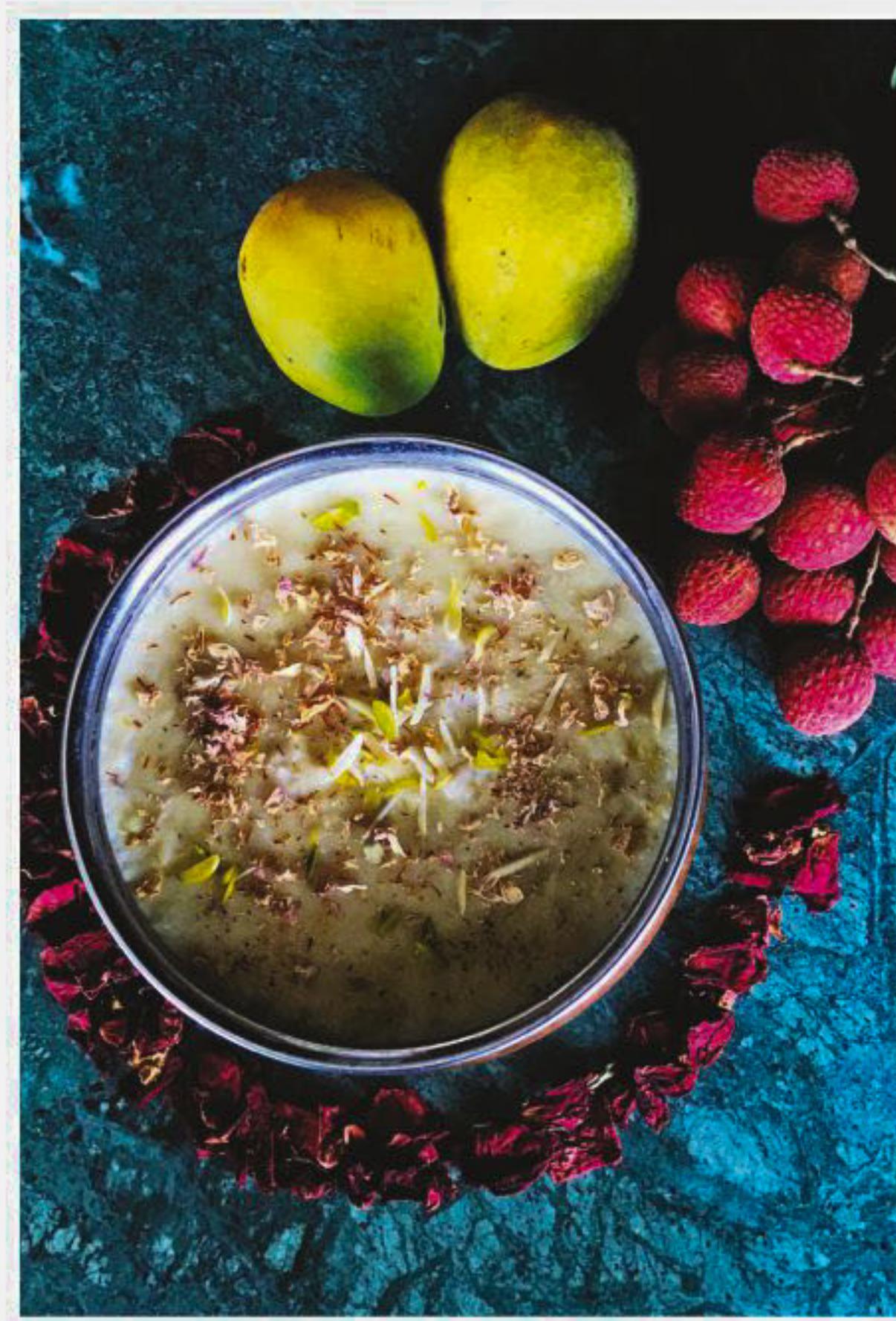
- 2 tbsp ghee
- 4 cups beetroot, grated
- 1 cup milk
- ¼ cup sugar

For the khoya (optional) —

- 1 tsp ghee
- ¼ cup milk
- ½ cup milk powder
- Chopped nuts to garnish (almonds and pistachios)

Method

On medium heat, place a saucepan. Preferably use a widespread and non-stick saucepan for the halwa as it's easier to stir and move the ingredients. Add the ghee and when it has melted, add the beetroot. Sauté for two minutes till the beetroot starts to cook through and shrink. Add the milk and stir well, cook with a lid on



for ten minutes, keep stirring occasionally. Remove the lid and keep cooking until the beetroot has softened and the water has evaporated. Add the sugar and keep stirring until the sugar dissolves. Once the sugar has been mixed evenly into the halwa, start mashing the beetroot, this can be mashed into a smooth texture or chunks of grated beetroot can be left in the mixture to add texture. Continue stirring until the halwa has thickened and the ghee starts to separate. When the ghee has visibly separated, the halwa is ready to serve.

For the khoya —

In a medium frying pan, add ghee, milk, and milk powder over low heat. Keep stirring until there are no lumps. Keep stirring until it thickens and separates from the pan. Let it cook before sprinkling it over the beetroot halwa.

LYCHEE AND CANDIED GINGER FIRNI

Firni is a great dessert to end any meal. This recipe is a festive version of the traditional rice pudding, which is spiced up with candied ginger and made sweet with the use of lychee and all its juicy goodness.

Ingredients

- ¼ cup polao rice (chinigura), or basmati rice

- 1 litre full fat milk, or coconut milk

- ½ cup sugar

- ½ tsp rose water

- 2 tbsp water

- 25-30 lychees, peeled and seeds removed

- 3 tbsp of candied ginger (Store bought or candied by cooking ginger strips in sugar syrup)

- Mango pieces or nuts to garnish

Method

Start by soaking the rice in water for at least half an hour; it can be left to soak for longer, if possible. Drain the water once the rice has been soaked. Spread it on a kitchen towel and place to dry under the fan. Rub water out with the help of a kitchen towel. Once the rice is dry, use a grinder to grind the rice into a fine semolina texture, while adding a bit of milk to help the process. In a large pot, add the milk and the rose water. Boil over medium heat until little bubbles form.

Once the bubbles form rapidly, the rice mixture can be added. Stir frequently until the milk has reduced and started to thicken, switch to low heat and continue stirring every 30-35 minutes, until the milk is almost half. While the firni is cooking, in a smaller saucepan, heat the sugar with a tablespoon or two of water to help melt evenly. Once the sugar has melted, add the de-stoned lychees along with any juices and crystallised ginger with syrup.

Bring this mixture to a boil until it has reduced to a syrupy consistency. Add this mixture to the pot of firni.

Continue reducing until it resembles a thick porridge. Once slightly cooled, it can be moved to a serving dish or clay firni pots. Garnish with pieces of mango or nuts.

Photo: Sobia Ameen