

the bottom leaving the spiced, watery part at the surface. Stir a couple of times while ladling out the soup.

Pumpkin Soup

Kadoo ka Champoo

Raju, a friend, and the present not-so-good guardian of what was once an old secret family recipe, recounted to me the story of how this dish got its strange name (the Indian name, Kadoo ka Champoo).

It is said that one of Raju's ancestors was a chief cook attached to a princely family who once prepared this soup for his masters and their guest, the British commanding officer of the local garrison.

Part way through the meal, the cook was commanded to appear in the dining hall before his masters. Fearing the worst, and trembling at his fate, the man approached the great hall with increasingly heavy footsteps. His master, far from being upset, was greatly pleased because his honored guest had expressed extreme happiness and satisfaction with the soup. When asked its name, the now highly stressed cook came out with the first few words that he could muster. Thus, here follows the recipe for a soup that translates from slang to mean a shaved pumpkin.

Pumpkin, peeled and cut into cubes	400 g/2 cups
Potatoes, peeled and diced	200 g/1 cup
Onions, sliced	50 g/¼ cup
Garlic, peeled	10 g/2 tsp
Ginger, peeled	10 g/2 tsp
Black peppercorns	6
Turmeric	3 g/½ tsp
Salt	to taste
Oil	20 ml/1 tbsp
Asafoetida/hing	a pinch
Mustard seeds	a pinch
Cumin seeds	a pinch
Dried chilis, cut in half	2
Mint leaves, shredded	5 g/1 tsp
Juice of one lemon	

Fill a pot with two quarts/two liters of water and boil together the pumpkin, potatoes, onions, garlic, ginger, peppercorns, turmeric and salt. When the vegetables are tender, about twenty minutes, retain the cooking liquid, but strain out the vegetables and process them to a smooth puree in a food processor. Return the puree to the pot with the retained liquid. Simmer for ten minutes or more, until the soup has thickened sufficiently that it coats the back of a spoon.

Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed pan and add the asafoetida, mustard, cumin, and chilis. When the seeds crackle, pour this mixture into the soup and incorporate well. Add the mint leaves, the lemon juice, and stir a few times. Remove to a serving bowl, taste, and adjust the seasoning, if required. Serve hot.

Tip: Hard-skinned pumpkin can be very difficult and potentially dangerous to peel. Use a sharp peeler and lay the pumpkin flat on your work surface. Peel away from your body

Tip: This soup works equally well with roasted pumpkin, avoiding the need to remove the outer skin. Cut the pumpkin into large pieces and put them in a preheated oven (180°C/375°F) for twenty minutes until the pulp is soft. Scrape off and discard the seeds. Scoop out the softened pulp and add it to the soup after the potatoes have softened.

Onion-Pepper Soup

Kaandhechya Rassa

In Maharashtra, a state that often sees a bumper crop of onions as well as a really hot summer, the residents have created from their very available ingredients a very refreshing soup. This spicy soup will cause perspiration, afterward leaving the skin feeling cooler.

Onions, chopped	400 g/2 cups
Oil	20 ml/1 tbsp
Cumin seeds	3 g/½ tsp
Lightly crushed coriander seeds	3 g/½ tsp
Fresh chilis, slit (see page 29)	2
Tomatoes, chopped	40 g/2 tbsp
Tamarind pulp	10 g/½ tbsp
Ginger, shredded	10 g/2 tsp

Asafoetida and Garlic Flavored Raita

Burhani raita

Yogurt	400 g/2 cups
Oil	10 ml/½ tbsp
Asafoetida	5 g/1 tsp
Garlic, peeled and sliced	5 g/1 tsp
Shallots, finely sliced	20 g/1 tbsp
Dried red chilis	2
Salt	to taste
Coriander leaves, chopped	5 g/1 tsp

Whisk the yogurt until smooth and airy and set aside.

Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed pan. Add the asafoetida and garlic and simmer on low heat until the garlic softens. Add the shallots and chilis and continue to stir on low heat until the shallots turn soft. Add the entire mixture to the yogurt along with the salt and coriander leaves. Stir until all the ingredients are evenly mixed. Adjust the seasoning, if required, before serving.

Spinach and Scallion Raita

Palak aur Hara Pyaaz ka Raita

Yogurt	400 g/2 cups
Ginger, grated	10 g/2 tsp
Green chilis, chopped	5 g/1 tsp
Cumin seed powder, roasted	3 g/½ tsp
Mint leaves, shredded	5 g/1 tsp
Salt	to taste
Sugar	a pinch
Spinach, young leaves, (sold bagged as baby spinach) rinsed and trimmed of their stalks	60g/¼ cup
Scallion, chopped	20g/1 tbsp

Okra

Okra has earned itself praise for being a great tasting vegetable while garnering scorn for its gummy, sticky characteristics.

Okra comes from the Abyssinian Empire which spanned present day Ethiopia, parts of Eritrea, Djibouti and Sudan. Early trading with the Arabs and the Indians spread its use in those countries. Several documents that have survived the middle ages suggest that it was cultivated along the Nile and in India.

Frequent clashes with the Moors moved the crop toward Spain and Portugal. African slave trafficking helped to spread the popularity of this vegetable to the United States where it is regularly cooked, especially in the Southern states.

Before its use as a table vegetable was recognized, okra was used as a thickening agent. As well as being used fresh, it can be dried and prepared as a powder that is used as a thickening agent much like cornstarch and several other starches.

Pickled, deep-fried, steamed, stewed, stir-fried, in tempura—okra will stand up to a great variety of culinary preparations. Okra is best at its young, tender stage; they take on a woody characteristic when they grow older. The skin has a fuzzy, felt-like quality while the inside contains tender, edible seeds. Its long, slender appearance topped with a conical cap earned it the nickname, “lady’s finger.”

Okra provides large amounts of potassium and calcium along with dietary fiber and vitamins A, B1, B2, B3 and B6.

Remember to wash okra and pat it dry before cutting. If you’ve not used this vegetable before, do not be put off by its characteristic gumminess.

Okra Tossed with Mangoes

Bhindi Aamwali

Okra, ends trimmed	200 g/1 cup
Oil	40 ml/2 tbsp

Cumin seeds	a pinch
Onions, chopped	50 g/¼ cup
Tomatoes, chopped	70 g/½ cup
Ginger, chopped	5 g/1 tsp
Chili powder	5 g/1 tsp
Turmeric	3 g/½ tsp
Mangoes, peeled and chopped	20 g/1 tbsp
Salt	to taste
Coriander leaves, chopped	5 g/1 tsp
Dried mango powder/amchur	a pinch

Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed pan and fry the okra until they are bright green. Remove from the pan and put aside to drain any excess oil.

Reheat the same oil and add the cumin seeds. When they crackle, add the onions and toss them until they are golden. Add the tomatoes. Reduce the heat to a simmer and stir occasionally until the tomatoes are pulpy. Add the turmeric, chili powder, ginger, and the okra and toss a few times. Add the mangoes, salt, and coriander. Toss until the mixture becomes moist and coats the okra. Finish with the amchur, remove from the heat, taste, and adjust the seasoning, if necessary. Serve.

Spice-Marinated Okra Crisps

Karare Bhindi

Okra, ends trimmed	500 g/1.1 lb
Bengal gram flour	50 g/¼ cup
Chili powder	10 g/2 tsp
Turmeric	5 g/1 tsp
Carom seeds/ajwain	a pinch
Salt	to taste
Chaat masala (see page 49)	5 g/1 tsp
Oil	to deep fry

Slice the okra lengthwise into long thin strips. Mix together the Bengal gram flour, chili powder, turmeric, carom seeds, salt, and enough water to make it

Add 500 ml/2½ cups of water and simmer for fifteen minutes until the potatoes are cooked half way through.

Add the coconut milk and bring the sauce to a rapid boil for two minutes.

Then add the beans and salt. Reduce the heat to simmer and cook for ten minutes or until the sauce thickens to the consistency of a thick soup.

Taste and adjust the seasonings, if necessary. Stir in the fresh coriander and serve hot.

Potatoes Cooked with Fenugreek Leaves

Aloo Methi

A memory I will always cherish is owning my very own organic farm. My recall always finds me in my overalls digging potatoes in the garden. I remember the wonderful bloom of the mustard flowers, the fragrance of freshly crushed fennel seeds in my hands, and the tenderness and sweetness of fenugreek leaves.

I often served this classic potato recipe during that time. I am sure that you will enjoy the dish equally as well using store-bought produce.

Potatoes, peeled, quartered, and boiled	400 g/2 cups
Oil	20 ml/1 tbsp
Cumin seeds	5 g/1 tsp
Onions, chopped	50 g/¼ cup
Garlic, chopped	5 g/1 tsp
Ginger, chopped	5 g/1 tsp
Fresh chilis, chopped	10 g/2 tsp
Fenugreek leaves, chopped	70 g/⅓ cup
Salt	to taste
Lemon	1
Coriander leaves, chopped	5 g/1 tsp

Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed pan and add the cumin seeds. When they crackle, add the onions and stir gently until they soften and turn golden. Add

the chopped garlic. When that softens, increase the heat and add the potatoes. Stir the potatoes occasionally until they are seared and brown. Add the fresh chilis, ginger, and salt. Toss all the ingredients together a few times, stirring in the fenugreek leaves. When the leaves wilt, remove the pan from the heat, sprinkle on the lemon juice and chopped coriander leaves. Taste, adjust seasoning, if necessary, and serve hot.

Maharashtrian Spice-Tossed Potatoes

Battanteche Sukhe

Potatoes, peeled, diced and boiled	400 g/2 cups
Oil	20 ml/1 tbsp
Cumin seeds	3 g/½ tsp
Red chilis, dried	2
Turmeric	5 g/1 tsp
Ginger, shredded	5 g/1 tsp
Fresh chilis, chopped	5 g/1 tsp
Coriander seeds	5 g/1 tsp
Juice of one lemon	
Coriander leaves, chopped	5 g/1 tsp

Roast the coriander seeds in a dry pan. Allow them to cool and gently crush them in the palm of your hand or use a mortar and pestle.

Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed pan and add the crushed cumin seeds. When the seeds crackle, add the red chilis and potatoes and cook, turning them occasionally to ensure that they become evenly golden and crusted. Add the salt, turmeric, ginger, and fresh chilis. Toss gently, sprinkle in the coriander seeds and lemon juice and remove from the heat. Taste and adjust the seasoning, if necessary. Stir in the coriander leaves and serve hot.

Lentil Dumplings in Mustard Sauce

Bodar Jhal

Masoor dal	250 g/1 ¼ cup
Urad dal	50 g/¼ cup
Fresh chili, chopped	2
Salt	to taste
Mustard oil	70 ml/to ½-inch depth in pan
Mustard seeds	20 g/1 tbsp
Fresh chili	3
Turmeric	10 g/2 tsp
Sugar	5 g/1 tsp
Tomatoes, fresh, pureed	50 g/¼ cup

Soak the lentils in water for about an hour to soften them. Drain. Grind in a food processor, adding water, if necessary, to a quite thick batter. Add the chopped fresh chilis and salt. Work the batter a bit with your hands to make it fluffy.

In a heavy-bottomed pan, heat the mustard oil to frying temperature. When hot, spoon in the lentil mixture, one dollop at a time to form evenly-sized dumplings. Fry on both sides turning them until they are evenly golden. Remove and drain on absorbent kitchen toweling.

Soak the mustard seeds in warm water for about fifteen minutes. Drain and grind to a thick paste along with the fresh chili.

Reheat the remaining oil, add the tomato puree, and stir for a few minutes. Add the mustard paste, chili powder, and turmeric. Simmer and add 150 ml/¾ cup of water and the dumplings. Simmer for ten minutes or so, until the gravy begins to thicken. Bring the sauce to a boil for a minute. When the sauce coats the dumplings, remove from heat and serve hot.

Lentil and Vegetable Stew

Bhaja Moonger Dal

Lentils/Moong dal	150 g/¾ cup
Cauliflower	100 g/½ cup

Sprinkle a bit of flour on a work table and roll the dough balls out into ¼-inch thick, round discs. Bake them on a hot griddle pan or non-stick pan until they are golden on either side. Brush a bit of the ghee onto each and serve hot.

Savory South Indian Rice and Lentil Pancake

Uttapam

These thick, crisp pancakes are delicious and easy to prepare. Soaking and fermentation requires that its preparation cannot be a spur of the moment decision, but it is an absolute delight to eat and to cook and well worth the effort.

Urad dal	100 g/½ cup
Rice	300 g/1 ½ cup
Salt	to taste
Sugar	5 g/1 tsp
Tomatoes, chopped	40 g/2 tbsp
Onions, chopped	40 g/2 tbsp
Coriander leaves, chopped	10 g/2 tsp
Fresh chilis, chopped	5 g/1 tsp
Cashew nuts, crushed	10 g/2 tsp
Cumin seeds, roasted and powdered in a mortar with pestle	5 g/1 tsp
Oil	20 ml/1 tbsp

Rinse the rice and the lentils and soak them in a bowl for three to four hours to soften them. Process them together in a food processor to a smooth paste. Mix them in a bowl with the sugar and leave in a cool place to ferment for six to eight hours. Mix in the salt and a bit of water, if necessary, to create a fluffy, thick batter of coating consistency.

Use a non-stick pan. Rub the surface with butter or oil to leave a thin coating. Pour enough batter onto the center and gently spread it in concentric circles with the bottom of the ladle to form a thick pancake.

Sprinkle on the chopped tomatoes, onions, coriander leaves, green chilis, cashew nuts, and a bit of roasted cumin powder. Drizzle on a bit of oil and flip

To make the stuffing mixture

Boil the milk and sugar together until the milk is reduced to half. Add the cardamom and pistachios and simmer for an hour, reducing it further, until the mixture thickens to the consistency of a thick porridge.

To make the syrup

Boil the sugar and water together until the sugar dissolves. Add the saffron strands.

Divide the dumpling mixture and hand-roll it into golf ball-sized balls. Flatten them in your palm and place about half a teaspoon of the stuffing into each dumpling. Form it into a ball again, with the stuffing in the middle, and immerse them in the boiling sugar syrup. Boil these for about twenty minutes until they rise to the surface and have a soft, spongy texture.

After cooking the dumplings, whisk the cornstarch in about 25 ml/2 tbsp of water and add it to the boiling syrup. Stir gently over a low flame until the mixture thickens.

Remove from the heat and let the dumplings and the syrup cool. Chill. Drizzle on rosewater just before serving for those who prefer.

Rasgulla

Anyone who goes to Kolkatta (previously Calcutta) should not return without completing a unique pilgrimage. Homage should be paid to a most famous Bengali confection, the “Roshogulla.” The “Roshogulla” or “rasgulla” has a time-honored altar—the sweet shop of K.C. Das and Son—which has several branches spread throughout the city—from the congested Baghbazar to seedy Ripon street.

K.C. Das and Sons, now global, could not have managed this fame were it not for the innovation and creativity of a noble ancestor named Nobin Chandra Das.

Nobin Chandra Das was born in 1846 into a family that controlled the sugar industry in Bengal at that time. With the passage of time, declining family fortune denied young Das the comfort and ease his predecessors had enjoyed.

Nobin Chandra Das lost his father three months before his birth. As formal

education could not be provided, given the limited family resources, he set up a sweet shop in 1864 in Jorsanko, Kolkatta. That shop failed.

Not one to give up, he pursued a second similar venture in 1866 in Baghbazar, Kolkatta. This shop did moderately well. Hoping to do something more worthwhile in his life, one that would leave an indelible mark, the young Nobin conceived of the rasgulla in 1868. During the time when the “Sandesh,” a dry, reduced-milk cheese, reigned supreme in Bengal, the syrupy rasgulla stood out in stark contrast.

As time went by, the fame and popularity of the sweet grew and grew. When his son Krishna took over, Krishna expanded the family business and pioneered a number of innovations in the field of confectionery such as “Rasmalai” and the first canned desserts in the country. Today the K.C. Das brand is a very important part of the Bengali culture.

Soft cottage cheese /channa (recipe below)	500 g/1.1 lb
Corn starch—	15 g/1 tbs
Castor Sugar or cane sugar	20 g/1 tbs

For the Syrup

Sugar	1 kg/2.2 lbs
Water	3 liters/3 quarts
Rose Water	50 ml/¼ cup
Milk	10 ml/2 tsp

Squeeze the water out of the channa (soft cottage cheese is called channa) until it is completely dry. Knead the channa and sugar to a smooth paste and until all the sugar has been dissolved. Add the cornstarch and continue kneading until smooth. Form the kneaded paste into marble-sized balls and set aside. Cover with a damp cloth.

For the Sugar Syrup

Bring the sugar and water to a boil and add the milk. The milk will curdle and rise to the top and will also produce scum. Spoon the curdled milk and scum out of the syrup. Reduce the heat to a simmer, and add the dumplings. They will rise to the top when done. Taking care to ensure that the sugar syrup does not thicken by reducing the heat as and when necessary, let the rasgollas simmer for twenty minutes. Serve chilled.