



# Home on the Range



## Try Adding Curry, Cardamom, Or Coconut To Spice Up Your Cooking

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LANGHORNE (Bucks Co.) — Heady aromas of sauteed garlic, mustard, or chili powder may not be a part of every American's kitchen, however they are familiar smells to southern Asian families.

These pungent scents and spicy tastes have been a part of Maria Kunjappu's kitchen for many years.

Kunjappu, Langhorne, now has experience cooking Indian food, however most of her practice came after she had left her home country of India.

Kunjappu, who grew up with the Indian name Ponnamma George in Kerala, India — the southern part of the country, a tropical area — is the oldest of four brothers and three sisters.

"I didn't really cook when I was home," said Kunjappu, who, although she remembers watching her mother, Marykutty, cook and clean, left the cooking responsibilities to a younger sister who had more interest in culinary arts.

After graduating from high school, she traveled to Delhi to study nursing, where she worked as a nurse for a year after graduation.

Denmark was next on her list, as she, who "always liked to travel," applied to an exchange program and went to the country to work for a year and a half and traveled to such destinations as Sweden and Rome.

She had always wanted to see America, so New York became her next destination.

After a short time in New York, cousins in the Philadelphia area welcomed her into their home and "once I settled, I knew I was going to stay," in America, Kunjappu said.

After moving to the Philadelphia area in September she met her husband, Jose, through her cousin's family, and the two were married in December 1975.

Once she settled in the U.S., Kunjappu, who "had an idea" of how to cook several Indian dishes but needed details, which she learned from friends and as she asked for recipes.

"I knew some things so I called and asked friends questions" to learn the art of Indian cooking.

Learning American dishes came later, and Kunjappu quickly learned to appreciate the ease of preparing American fare.

"The rice is OK, but you have to sautee, stir, and grind the ingredients" of Indian dishes, she said.

A typical Indian kitchen includes such spices as chili powder, coriander, cardamom, cinnamon, cumin, cloves, fennel seed, ginger, garlic, tamarind, turmeric powder, onion, mustard seed, black pepper, curry leaves, and coconut.

Some of these spices are used for both entree and dessert dishes, such as coconut or cardamom.

Raisins, cashews, or carrots may also be used in both dinner and dessert.

In India, mango, jackfruit, and several varieties of banana trees in the family's backyard yielded fruits for her family — a sweet treat to complement their diet of rice and fish.

"We lived in front of the river, and my father used to catch fish, so we ate fish a lot," she said. Festivals, such as Easter celebration, were also a highlight, as the Christian family would enjoy meat dishes such as beef.

Since fresh vegetables, fruits, and fish were readily available, Kunjappu's father, George, who did the grocery shopping, made

the trip to an open market for fresh meat or other items once a month.

Because of the heat, "we never had cheese," said Kunjappu, who grew up without a refrigerator. The little cheese the family ate was made from yogurt.

Dairy products, however, were also a staple of the family's diet as "we always had a sheep or two" and occasionally a cow for fresh milk twice daily.

"If we didn't have a cow we bought milk from neighbors who had cows," she said.

Although cow's milk is available, "sheep milk is really tasty," asserts Kunjappu, who also ate "a lot of yogurt" growing up and still uses it often in her cooking at home.

Yogurt was eaten plain or mixed with a little water and spiced up with crushed ginger, onion, pepper, and curry leaves before it was poured over warm rice.

"We made it every day," she said. One tablespoon of yogurt, used as a starter, is added to milk after it is boiled and then cooled to lukewarm temperature. This will produce more yogurt by the next morning.

Chai, or tea, is a fixture in India, as the drink is an essential part of Asian hospitality. According to Kunjappu, "there are a lot of varieties of tea" in the country.

"When people come, it's a routine thing to offer them tea or coffee," she said, adding that many of her Indian neighbors had access to fresh coffee beans growing in their backyard.

When the weather is too hot, however, to serve tea, lemonade — squeezed from fresh lemons grown on trees in the backyard — is also a refreshing treat.

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## Featured Recipe



Breaking the vermicelli — a thin noodle made of wheat flour and water — is one of the first steps in making payasam.

Preparing Indian food at home does not have to mean hours of grinding, chopping, and dicing.

The variety of Indian food products available in grocery stores makes the unique flavors of India accessible to the busy cook.

Here is a quick and easy recipe for a typical dessert from southern India, the creamy "payasam."

### PAYASAM

- 1 pack vermicelli
- 4 whole cardamom, crushed
- 1 cup water
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 tablespoons butter, divided
- ¼ cup cashews
- ¼ cup raisins
- 1 tablespoon flaked coconut, or more if desired

Warm one tablespoon butter in a cooking pot. When it begins to melt, break the vermicelli into small pieces and fry it, then add crushed cardamom and one cup water. Cook for 5-10 minutes then add condensed milk and more water if it is too thick (it should have a soup-like consistency). Take it off heat.

Fry cashes, raisins, and coconut with remaining one table-spoon butter.

Pour it into the vermicelli mixture. Ready to serve.



Whole cardamom are ground with a mortar and pestle before they are added to the mixture.

## Change Up Your Mealtimes With Unique Flavors From India

Hamburgers, hotdogs and pizza will always be standard fare, but why not add some spice to your culinary life?

Indian cuisine holds an array of flavors as vast as the country itself. The flavors and fragrances unique to Indian cuisine come from the use of a variety of spices, including cilantro, carda-

mom, turmeric, cumin, fennel and fenugreek.

Vegetarian dishes are very popular throughout India, but Indians also cook with a variety of meats, poultry and seafood.

Often times, the meat is cooked in a "masala" or sauce that is made from a blend of spices and usually contains tomatoes and

other vegetables such as peppers and onions.

Rice is the main accompaniment to a meal, but a variety of other accompaniments are also popular, including breads such as naans, chapatis and the ever-favorite pappadum — a crispy lentil chip similar to a tortilla.

Traditional garnishes include chutneys and "pickle," which are dips made with fruit, spices and vegetables.

Dishes from southern India tend to be very hot and spicy and are traditionally served with rice, while recipes from northern India have more subtle and mild flavors and are served with breads made from wheat and other grains.

North Indian cuisine is also known for meats and breads cooked in a clay and brick oven called a tandoor.

Many people believe that preparing Indian cuisine at home means hours of grinding spices, chopping meats and dicing vegetables, but making an Indian

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## Recipe Topics

If you have recipes for topics listed below, please share them with us. We welcome your recipes, but ask that you include accurate measurements, a complete list of ingredients, and clear instructions with each recipe you submit. Be sure to include your name and address. Recipes should reach our office one week before the publishing date listed below.

Send your recipes to Lou Ann Good, Lancaster Farming, P.O. Box 609, Ephrata, PA 17522.

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