

Hari Nayak: *Goes* Indian Cuisine **Mod**

Enjoy multifaceted flavors without intimidating recipes.

Some older chefs don't like Hari Nayak's style. "They'll look at my recipes and tell me, 'That's not Indian cooking!'" Nayak says with a good-natured laugh. "But I tell them, 'Well, this is what I like to eat and cook. I am Indian. I am a professional chef, so, yes, this is Indian cuisine.'"

EASY AND INVENTIVE

Nayak's new cookbook, *Modern Indian Cooking*, provides the exotic flavors of India minus lengthy lists of ingredients and difficult preparation techniques. Nayak's sumptuously photographed cookbook lacks the mysterious, old world language inherent in many Indian cookbooks. "I've been working as a chef in the United States for 15 years and found that my colleagues had stayed away from Indian cookbooks because of the foreign terminology. I wanted to provide something more accessible," he explains.

Professionally, Nayak wears many toques, expressing his passion for food in cookbooks, food styling, culinary business management, and cooking for charity. He serves as both chef and consultant to large corporations but indulges his passion as a pastry chef at Hari's Bake Shop and also at his second store, Halo Fête, "America's first ice cream patisserie," in Princeton, New Jersey, where he ingeniously uses ice cream as a filling for upscale French pastries. A top-of-the-class graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Nayak was preparing meals for his family by age 8. He left his hometown in a coastal area of southern India to follow in the path of his favorite TV chefs, Julia Child and Martin Yan, who first sparked his interest in cooking.

A new generation of Indian chefs is striving to make an exotic cuisine more accessible, and their efforts are well-received. In the United Kingdom, a television chef of Indian descent, Anjum Anand, recently ousted the latest Harry Potter book from the top seller lists with her *Indian Food Made Easy* cookbook. Ruta Kahate, head of her own cooking school in Oakland, California, says, "My mother's goda masala has over 40 ingredients, but very few Indian people cook that way every day. The truth is, there's a way to cook Indian food that only tastes like you've slaved over it for hours." Kahate, author of *5 Spices, 50 Dishes: Simple Indian Recipes*



Starter Kit

Hari Nayak, coauthor of *Modern Indian Cooking*, says, "People tell me all of the time that they would like to try Indian cooking, but they don't know where to begin. I tell them it begins with having a few Indian flavors to use," namely garam masala, a spice blend that typically includes cinnamon, cumin, cloves, nutmeg, and cardamom.

Indian cooks traditionally blended garam masala at home, but it is now widely

available at grocery and gourmet markets. Nayak says the dry spices to have on hand are cardamom, turmeric, coriander, and cumin. Fresh ingredients to impart Indian flavors include ginger, garlic, and chiles.

"If you have these, you're good to go," says Nayak. "Don't feel afraid to experiment. Good food is one of life's greatest pleasures, and trying something new will result in a memorable meal to share with family and friends."

Using Five Common Spices, says her students are amazed that her native cuisine can be so easy, intriguing, and delicious.

“We are basically trying to tell people that Indian cooking does not have to be a recipe that has 25 or 30 ingredients,” says Nayak. “And even though certain techniques, like oven baking, aren’t really traditional methods, there is no reason why a Western chef can’t use familiar cooking techniques like baking, stir-frying, and sautéing.”

Another contemporary approach is adding complementary Western ingredients to decidedly traditional Indian dishes; this came about naturally after Nayak and his coauthor Vikas Khanna, a celebrity chef and New York City restaurateur, concentrated on creating Indian cuisine with “non-Indian” ingredients. These accents came from the Far East, Latin America, Europe, and the Mediterranean. “We introduced ingredients like olive oil, rosemary, Mexican chilies, tarragon, thyme, soy sauce, and even wasabi with wonderful results,” says Nayak. “So, it’s a mix of something new—nontraditional—to encourage the professional chef or home cook to try Indian cooking.”

HEALTHFUL, BOLD FLAVORS

These days, Indian cooking is something Nayak wishes Western—and more Indian—cooks would try because of its potential healthfulness. Experts say that obesity is on the rise in urban, middle class India, especially among children. Fast-food restaurants now dot the landscape as Indian people steadily adopt modern eating patterns instead of dining at home.

“India is very regional; it’s a highly diverse nation and so is the extensive cuisine. In the north, there’s more emphasis on meat and dairy; in the east and west, there’s more focus on seafood; and in the south, many dishes are based on rice. Spice links it all

Spice Up Your Health

The spices that define Indian cuisine are believed to be very healthy, too.

- Cinnamon helps control blood glucose in people with type 2 diabetes, aids digestion, relieves gas, stimulates circulation, and helps fight the common cold.
- Turmeric has been shown to reduce inflammation and inhibit cancer cells.
- Chiles contain capsaicin, which triggers “feel good” chemicals to boost your mood.
- Ginger is a natural pain reliever and anti-inflammatory and also relieves nausea.
- Cumin is excellent for colds, fevers, and minor digestive complaints.
- Cardamom soothes indigestion, helps comfort a sore throat, and gives you fresh breath.



Spicy Red Lentils

Serves 6

- 1 cup red lentils, rinsed and drained
- 4 cups water
- ¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt to taste
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- ½ tablespoon ginger, minced
- ½ tablespoon garlic, minced
- 1 fresh green chili pepper, minced with seeds
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 3 tablespoons fresh cilantro, chopped
- 3 tablespoons fresh mint, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

In a saucepan over high heat, combine the lentils, water, turmeric, bay leaf and salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium and cook the lentils, stirring occasionally, and simmer until tender but firm, 12 to 15 minutes. Drain.

In a small frying pan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion, ginger, garlic, chili pepper, coriander, cumin, cinnamon, paprika, and sugar. Reduce the heat to low and cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat.

In a large bowl, combine the lentils and the spice mixture; toss gently to mix. Stir in cilantro and mint. Stir in the lemon juice and serve immediately.

**Natural
Nutritional
Nurturing**



Vita Spelt whole grain pasta nurtures the body while it provides nutrition. It is loaded with high quality complex carbohydrates, protein, dietary fiber and phytonutrients from the natural bran; besides that, it is the best tasting whole grain organic pasta in the marketplace.

**Vita Spelt pasta...
taking care
of your body
from the inside out.**



Purity Foods, Inc.
2871 West Jolly Road
Okemos, MI 48864
1-800-997-7358
www.purityfoods.com

Cuisine chef's table

together," says Nayak. Although some Indian cuisine is heavy, particularly in the northern region where food is often fried and accompanied by heavy cream sauces, overall, Indian food presents many healthy choices. Palm oil and coconut oils have given way to healthier options—Nayak's recipes use vegetable oil such as canola—and when you cook at home, you're in control of the cooking technique and ingredients.

"Indian food is well-balanced and is mainly based in vegetarian dishes," says Nayak. "Even though meat is popular, Indians tend to use more vegetable-based protein than those used in Western diets,

such as lentils, chickpeas, and legumes, and we use many whole grain starches."

Indian cuisine might entice you to spice things up in the kitchen and sample more beans and legumes. "Think of it this way: Indian cooking is no more complicated than cooking what you normally cook and then adding some new, exciting flavors ... and that's how, like me, you can create your own Indian cuisine," Nayak says.

For more information about Hari Nayak, visit www.harinayak.com. Ruta Kahate can be found online at www.rutaruta.com. ♣

— MD



Mint Pilaf With Potatoes and Cumin

Serves 6

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 small onion, thinly sliced
- 1 small potato, peeled and cut into ½-inch dices
- 1½ tablespoons ginger, minced
- 2 tablespoons fresh mint leaves, minced
- 1 fresh green chili, minced
- 1¼ cups basmati rice, soaked, rinsed, and drained
- 2¼ cups water
- Salt to taste
- 3 teaspoons cumin seeds, roasted and crushed coarsely

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat and sauté the onion until brown, about 5 to 7 minutes. Add the potato, ginger, half the mint, and the chili and cook, stirring, about 2 minutes.

Add the rice and sauté for 3 minutes. Add the water and the salt. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to the lowest setting, cover the pan, and cook until the rice is done, 10 to 15 minutes. Do not stir the rice while it cooks. Remove from the heat and let the rice rest for about 5 minutes. Transfer to a serving platter, sprinkle with roasted cumin and the remaining mint leaves and serve.