

Curry Addicts Unite!

By: Paul Born

How do you get a nine-year old to eat two pounds of spinach? Make it for his birthday at his request!

I'm serious - when I asked my son what he wanted to eat on his birthday (we gave him the choice of any restaurant in town), he replied, "Sag Paneer and an Indian meal made by you, Dad."

This may seem like a strange request for a nine-year-old Waterloo County Mennonite boy, but when I think about my own childhood, it hardly seems odd.

I grew up in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia and many of my neighbours were from the Punjab of India. Sikhs and Mennonites had a lot in common: we had close-knit communities, much of our social life revolved around church activities, we farmed and we all loved to eat!

As we worked together on the farm fields we would share our food. I remember sitting in the middle of a raspberry patch as a boy, with a roti in my hand and receiving a ladle of the finest homemade curry you could ever taste. I fell in love with Indian food on the spot.

Thirty years on, that love has not wavered – an entire cupboard in our kitchen is devoted to Indian spices, I seek out Indian restaurants wherever I travel, and, for fun, I love nothing more than to invite over a dozen friends for an Indian meal.

I start by shopping for the freshest ingredients and I will often cook for eight hours - creating up to a dozen dishes. Honestly, there's nothing that gives me as much joy as cooking an Indian meal for friends and family.

And so, I'm happy to share my recipe for Sag Paneer with you. This is the dish my son specifically requested for his birthday meal and I hope it will soon become a special dish in your home!

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs of spinach (frozen works great as well)
- 1 lb of paneer, cut into small blocks (Available at Indian supermarkets and some specialty sections of grocery stores). Firm ricotta cheese also works.
- 4 tablespoons dry fenugreek leaves or a small bunch fresh
- 2 onions, chopped
- 5-6 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 inch chopped ginger (a tablespoon)
- 3 teaspoons cumin
- 1 teaspoon tumeric
- 2 fresh tomatoes (or a can of well drained whole tomatoes)
- Salt to taste (a teaspoon to start)
- Juice of half a lemon

Steps:

- I always start by getting the spinach ready – if frozen and pre-chopped just thaw it and put in a strainer – the key is to get it as dry as possible. If steaming fresh, cook for a couple of minutes in boiling water and drain very well – let it sit in a strainer while it cools. Once cooled, chop it in about 1-inch pieces.
- Also if using canned tomatoes drain very well – I will often have these sit in a strainer as well while I prep the rest of the meal– I love this dish fairly dry.
- Cube the paneer into ½ inch (or bigger) squares and fry them in a small amount of oil until they are browned on all sides – I hate this job as oil splatters all over the place – but believe me when I say that browned cheese in sauce is what gives this dish a “to die for” rating!
- Fry the onion, garlic and ginger slowly (on low) until onion sare golden (my secret here is to cook as if caramelizing onions – I will often let this process go on for a half hour).
- Turn up the heat to medium high and add the cumin and tumeric and stir constantly for about a minute, then add the tomatoes, salt and lemon.
- To finish add the fried cheese.
- Serve with rice or naan bread (we often substitute with Greek pita – easier to get in the store).

Note: I own a dozen Indian cookbooks but the one I use the most is called The Curry Cookbook by Charmaine and Reuben Solomon. It's printed by Raincoast Books out of Vancouver.

And you might want to check out the curry addicts' website:
<http://www.madgeandgeoffrey.co.uk/links.htm>!

