



In This Month's Recipes:

- ♀ Sri Lankan Etiquette, Customs & Cuisine
- ♀ Menu & Recipes from Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan Cuisine

- Rice and curry are staples of Sri Lankan cuisine.
- Typical meals include curries of fish, meat or poultry, and curries made with vegetables and lentils. Condiments such as chutneys and sambols are included and may include coconut, onions, lime juice and chillies. Maldive fish (dried fish) is a flavor enhancer.¹
- There are three main types of Sri Lankan curry: White, Red and Black. White curries are, mild, based on coconut milk and very liquid. Red curries contain a large amount of chili powder or ground red chilies with a few other spices. Black curries are dark in color which is achieved by the roasting of the spices until they are a deep brown.²
- In addition to cinnamon, a number of herbs and spices are commonly used in Sri Lankan cuisine: chilies, coriander, cumin, curry leaves, fennel, fenugreek, garlic, ginger, lemon grass, lime, onion, rampe (also known as pandan leaf) and turmeric.

Cinnamon: A Sri Lankan Leading Export

Sri Lanka is one of the world's leading exporters of cinnamon, producing about four-fifths of international output as well as most of the choicest grades from the sweetly scented inner bark of the cinnamon tree.



Cinnamon is the dried bark of various laurel trees in the cinnamomun family. Cinnamon sticks are made from long pieces of bark that are rolled, pressed and dried.

It's easy to forget the influence of cinnamon in world history. The spice in part lured explorers such as Vasco da Gama and Columbus to travel around the world and brave the storm-tossed seas.

The use of cinnamon as a spice was known in ancient Egypt and is mentioned in the Old Testament. In the early days, it was collected in the wild, but after the coastal provinces were conquered by the Dutch East India Company, small commercial groves were planted in the late 18th Century.

Cinnamon trees have a productive life span of about 40-50 years after which they have to be replanted. When that happens, growers receive generous subsidies from the government.

Excerpted from: "BBC NEWS | In Pictures: Sri Lanka's Spice of Life, Bashing the Bark."

Sri Lankan Etiquette

Dining:

- Use your right hands to eat.
- Use bread or small balls of rice to scoop food off your plate.
- Leaving a small amount of food on your plate indicates that you have eaten your fill. Finishing all your food means that you are still hungry.
- Expect to leave within half an hour after the meal ends. Most socializing occurs before the meal.

Gift Giving:

- Avoid flowers - they are used in mourning.
- Only give alcohol if you are sure the recipient drinks.
- White or black are the colors of funerals and mourning.
- If the recipient is Muslim avoid pig products, alcohol or any foodstuffs that contain meat.
- Hindus should not be given gifts made of leather.
- Give and receive gifts with two hands.

Excerpted from: "Sri Lanka - Language, Culture, Customs and Business Etiquette." *Professional Translation Services | Interpreters | Intercultural Communication & Training.* <<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/srilanka.html>>.

Recipes

Our thanks to Carolyn Mayers for providing most of the following recipes. Questions about the following recipes? e-mail Carolyn at crmayers@mac.com

Sri Lankan cuisine is very similar to the food of southern regions of India, is DELICIOUS and is scorchingly hot in most cases. While the amount of heat has been toned down quite a bit from the original recipes here, I suggest that if you are not fond of spicy food you reduce the amount of chili pepper even further.

Though quite a few recipes used fenugreek, this is not a spice I have developed a taste for so avoided those. Try it and see if YOU like it. For you dessert lovers, I was unable to find anything I thought seemed interesting enough to try, though the superb coconut pound cake from the April, Cambodian recipes would be an excellent choice as they use a TON of coconut in Sri Lankan cooking. Also, cinnamon is a major crop so if you have a favorite cookie or even cinnamon ice cream recipe (YUM!!), go for it.

Menu

Cucumber Sambol (Cucumber Salad)
Kukul Mas Baduma (Roasted or Grilled Chicken)
Fish Curry with Tomato
Sri Lankan Palak Dal (Lentils with Spinach)
Yellow Rice
Wambatu Curry (Sri Lankan Eggplant Curry)
Hot Cabbage and Spring Onion Stir-fry
Ala saha Nivithi Badum (Potatoes with Spinach)
Cinnamon Ice Cream

There are more recipes at these sites, many, many more that I wanted to try:

http://www.asianonlinerecipes.com/online_recipes/srilanka/srilanka.php

http://www.asianspicyrecipes.com/recipes/sri_lanka/sri_lanka.php

<http://www.infolanka.com/recipes/index.htm>

I do hope you enjoy Sri Lankan food as much as we did!

Cucumber Sambol (Cucumber Salad)

Adapted from http://www.asianonlinerecipes.com/online_recipes/srilanka/cucumber-sambol.php



There are lots of sambol recipes on the first site listed above and they are infinitely flexible. This one reminds me of an old-fashioned cucumber and onion salad my Dad used to make, only coconut milk is used instead of sour cream, and lemon juice instead of vinegar. The adding of the lemon juice to the coconut neutralizes its flavor and you are left with a lovely, creamy dressing. It is cucumber season in most of the U.S. now, so enjoy some fresh cucumbers from your farmer's market and support your local farmers! Serve at room temperature because coconut milk solidifies somewhat when it gets too cold.

Serves 4 – 6, depending on the size of the cucumbers.

2 – 3 medium-sized cucumbers, peeled and thinly sliced

1 – 2t salt

3 scallions, thinly sliced

¼t red pepper flakes

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced (optional, recommended)

½ - ¾c coconut milk (the thicker the better – and I used full fat)

1 – 2T lemon juice

Place a layer of cucumber slices in a colander and sprinkle with some of the salt. Repeat until you have used up all the slices. Allow to sit, to draw out some of the water from the cucumbers, for about an hour. Press on the cucumbers at the end of an hour to help remove more liquid, then rinse briefly but thoroughly, tossing with your hands and drain very well (I even dried mine with some towels.). Place cucumbers and scallions in a bowl large enough to accommodate tossing the salad. Mix together the remaining ingredients in a small bowl, stirring well to combine. The dressing should be fairly thick. Allow to rest for 10 minutes, then add to cucumber/scallion mixture. Toss well and serve within an hour or two if possible. It will still be fine after that, the dressing will just be thinner.

Kukul Mas Baduma (Roasted or Grilled Chicken)

Adapted from http://www.asianspicyrecipes.com/recipes/sri_lanka/kukul_mas_baduma.php

We were in the middle of a heat wave while I while I was testing these recipes –which I guess made it more authentic since it is SO hot in Sri Lanka! Anyway, I tell you this simply to say it was too hot to turn the oven on in the house, so I chose to grill this chicken recipe instead of cooking in the oven and it came out beautifully! hope you enjoy it.

Serves 6

2lbs. chicken parts, your choice, bone in or out, with skin or not
2 cloves garlic, minced
2T fresh ginger, minced
¼t ground black pepper
¼t ground cinnamon
large pinch ground cloves, up to 1/8t
2T vinegar (I used rice but cider or another would be fine)
4T oil
¼t sugar
¼ - ½t salt (I used almost ½)
Pinch turmeric



Combine all of the ingredients from garlic through turmeric in a small bowl and mix well. Place chicken and spice mixture into a large, leakproof plastic bag and smoosh the chicken around until the spices are well distributed all over the chicken. Seal bag and allow to marinate for at least 2 hours or up to 8 hours, “re-smooshing” from time to time to make sure all the chicken has spice mix on it. Preheat grill to medium heat. Cook chicken pieces over medium heat (indirect preferably) for approximately 40 minutes for bone-in, less for boneless, depending on your choice of parts, or until the juices run clear when stuck with a fork. Thighs will take longer than breasts. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Fish Curry with Tomato

Adapted from http://www.asianonlinerecipes.com/online_recipes/srilanka/fish-curry-tamarind.php

This is NOT a tomato based curry, but rather a coconut milk based curry with some added tomato. A snap to make and absolutely scrumptious. I used halibut in this recipe, but any firm white fish, or even shrimp or scallops could be used in this, just adjust the cooking time. Whatever you use the pieces should be fairly small and of relatively uniform size so as to finish cooking all at the same time. This is a very pretty light orange color and looks beautiful with the cabbage stir-fry a few recipes down. Enjoy!

Serves 4



1lb. firm white fish such as halibut or grouper, or small scallops or shrimp (shelled)
 1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
 3 cloves garlic
 1T chopped ginger
 ½ - ¾c chopped tomato, either fresh or canned, your choice (I used canned)
 2T oil of choice
 1½T curry powder
 ¼ - ½ t red pepper flakes (depending on how hot you like things)
 ¼ - ½ t salt
 1t flour
 2c coconut milk (again, thicker is better, and I used full-fat)

Rinse and dry the fish. Whatever you are using, you need to cut it into approximately 1½ inch pieces – small bite sized. Small shrimp or scallops will probably be ok left uncut. Set aside. Place onion through tomato in bowl of food processor and process until well pureed. Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add pureed mixture and cook approximately 5 minutes, or until some of the liquid cooks off. Stir in the pepper flakes and curry powder and cook for 1 minute. Stir in the flour and salt and cook for 1 minute more. Add the coconut milk and turn the heat up to medium-high, stirring well until all ingredients are well combined. Cook until coconut milk boils, stirring occasionally. Add the fish of choice and stir. Cook 2 – 3 minutes over this heat then reduce heat to medium or medium-low, just enough to keep it bubbling just a bit. Cook another 8 minutes or so, less for scallops, or until fish is cooked through and opaque. Serve hot over rice, preferably basmati.

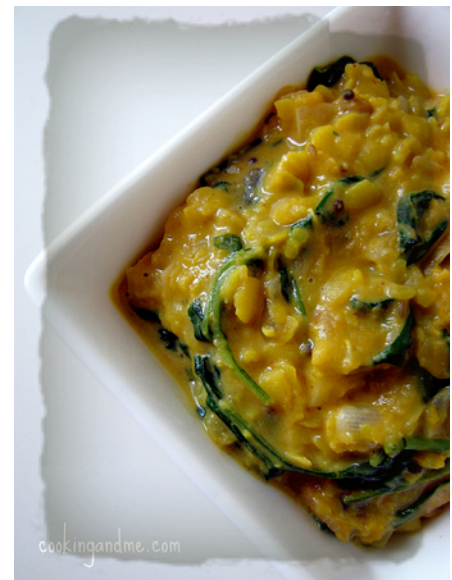
Sri Lankan Palak Dal (Lentils with Spinach)

Adapted from <http://www.cookingandme.com/2009/06/sri-lankan-palak-dal-recipe.html>

Another pretty dish, especially for a dal, and a wonderful vegan entrée alternative. With more vegetables in it than your typical dal, this one seems lighter and more interesting than most. We loved it.

Serves 6, at least

1½c red split lentils
 1 -10 oz. box frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained
 2T oil
 ½t mustard seeds (preferably brown)
 1 small onion, finely chopped
 ½t red pepper flakes
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 ¼t ground cinnamon
 ½ t cumin seeds
 ½c chopped tomato, either fresh or canned (I used canned)
 1½c coconut milk (any kind will work here so light is OK)
 ¼ - ½t salt



Rinse the lentils and pick them over for stones and debris. Place in a large saucepan and cover with water to cover by about an inch and a half. Turn heat to high and bring to a boil. Stir and reduce heat to medium-low. Cook lentils for about 10 – 15 minutes or until they are just tender and not dissolved – if you cook them too long they will fall apart completely. Drain and set aside. Heat oil in another large saucepan over medium heat and add mustard seeds. Cook for 2 minutes then add onions through cumin seeds. Saute for about 6 minutes then add tomatoes. Stir well and cook for another minute. Add the spinach and stir it in. Reduce heat to medium-low, and cook 5 minutes. Add lentils and stir gently. Add coconut milk and salt and stir gently but well enough to combine everything. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes, uncovered, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking. Serve with rice.

Yellow Rice

Adapted from <http://paradisaya.tripod.com/recipes/yellow.html>

Yellow and black rice is more like it! It IS yellow, but there is so much black pepper it that it really is speckled. This easy recipe would compliment any of the dishes given here, but especially the cabbage, and the chicken. I recommend using basmati rice.

Serves 8

3c rice, preferably basmati

4T ghee (clarified butter) or butter

2 medium or one large onion, minced

large pinch ground cloves

¼ - ½t ground black pepper

2t ground cardamom

1t salt

1½t turmeric

4c coconut milk

1c water

Fresh parsley, minced (optional, for garnish)



Wash rice thoroughly and drain in colander. Heat ghee or butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onions and cook 6 minutes. Add cloves, pepper, cardamom, salt and turmeric and stir. Add rice and stir well until rice is coated with spices. Add coconut water and water, stir, and raise heat to high. Bring to a boil, stir again and reduce heat to medium-low to low. Simmer, covered, for 20 minutes without peeking. Remove from heat and allow to sit another 10 minutes. Serve hot.

Wambatu Curry (Sri Lankan Eggplant Curry)

Adapted from <http://cookingaroundtheworld.co.uk/2010/08/01/sri-lanka-%E2%80%93-rice-and-curry/>

Between the frying of the eggplant and the smoothness of the coconut milk the texture of this is delightfully creamy. This vegetable dish would also make another great vegan entrée, served with rice.

Serves 6



1 large or several smaller eggplants, about a pound and a half

¼c oil

3T fresh ginger, minced

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced

½ t turmeric

¼t red pepper flakes (optional)

1T vinegar

½t mustard seeds

½ - ¾c coconut milk

½t salt

1T sugar

Cut the eggplant into strips about 2 inches wide by 4 inches long. Heat oil over medium to medium-high heat in a large skillet or wok. Add eggplant in small batches and stir-fry until golden brown. Remove and place on paper towels to drain, and repeat until all eggplant is cooked. Reduce heat to medium-low. If there is a lot of oil leftover after cooking the eggplant, remove enough so there is only about 2T left in the pan. Place the ginger through mustard seeds in the pan and sauté about 2 minutes. Add coconut milk, salt and sugar, stir and cook another 2 minutes. Add the cooked eggplant and simmer about 5 minutes. Serve hot or at room temperature.

Hot Cabbage and Spring Onion Stir-fry

Adapted from <http://www.infolanka.com/recipes/mess3/13.html>



I used red cabbage for this and it is gorgeous! Very simple, easy and quick, and one of those dishes you will find yourself making to go with your regular dinners – the flavors would compliment a wide variety of main courses. You may make it with green cabbage, of course, and savoy cabbage would be pretty, too. But if you need color try the red!

Serves 6

1 medium sized head red cabbage, thinly sliced
2T olive oil
4 – 6 scallions, cut into 1-inch pieces, greens and whites separated
¼t up to 1t red pepper flakes (I used a round ½ and it was perfect for us)
3T fresh ginger, minced
¼t salt

Heat the oil over medium heat in a wok or very large skillet. Add the scallion whites, ginger and red pepper flakes and cook, stirring for 2 minutes. Add the cabbage and salt and stir-fry for about 6 minutes. You may add a little water if it seems dry. Add the scallion greens and cook, stirring, for another 3 – 5 minutes, depending on how well cooked you like your cabbage. Serve hot.

Ala saha Nivithi Badum (Potatoes with Spinach)

Adapted from <http://www.infolanka.com/recipes/mess3/4.html>



This was my husband Tom's favorite recipe this month and pronounced that we could "have this again", code for "please make this for me again because I loved it". We are so lucky that the potatoes in the garden started coming in just in time for this one! Spicy! Reduce the amount of pepper flakes if you want it milder, but do not omit them completely or it will lose too much character.

Serves 6

6 medium to medium-large red potatoes, or a whole bunch of little ones, about 1½ lbs.
4T oil of choice (I used safflower)
1 medium onion, chopped
1t cumin seeds
1t red pepper flakes (or less to taste)
4 cloves garlic, minced
3T fresh ginger, minced
1 – 10oz. box chopped frozen spinach, thawed and drained
¼ - ½t salt

Scrub and dry the potatoes. Cut into about 1-inch cubes. Heat oil in a large skillet or wok, preferably non-stick, over medium-high heat. Add the potatoes and sauté, stirring, until they are golden brown on all sides. Remove and place on paper towel to drain. Reduce heat to medium, add onion and cook for about 5 minutes. Add cumin seeds through ginger and cook, stirring, for a minute or two. Add the spinach and salt and cook for 5 minutes, stirring. Add potatoes and cook until heated through, about 3 minutes. Serve hot.

Additional recipe:

Cinnamon Ice Cream

From the Food Network <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/gale-gand/cinnamon-ice-cream-recipe/index.html>



2 cups half-and-half
2 cups heavy cream
1/2 vanilla bean, [split](#) lengthwise
1 cinnamon stick
3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
9 egg yolks
3/4 cup [sugar](#)

In a saucepan over medium heat, heat the half-and-half, cream, [vanilla](#), cinnamon stick and ground cinnamon, whisking occasionally to make sure the mixture doesn't burn or stick to the bottom of the pan. When the cream mixture reaches a fast [simmer](#) (do not let it [boil](#)), turn off the heat and let the flavors infuse for 10 minutes.

Whisk together the egg yolks and the sugar. In a thin stream, [whisk](#) half of the cream mixture into the egg yolk mixture. Then pour the egg-cream mixture back into the [saucepan](#) containing the rest of the cream mixture. Heat over medium heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. At 160 degrees, the mixture will give off a puff of steam. When the mixture reaches 180 degrees it will be thickened and creamy, like [eggnog](#). If you don't have a thermometer, test it by dipping a wooden spoon into the mixture. Run your finger down the back of the spoon. If the stripe remains clear, the mixture is ready; if the edges blur, the mixture is not quite thick enough yet. When it is ready, quickly remove it from the heat.

Meanwhile, in a bowl, put two handfuls of ice cubes in the bottom, and add cold water to cover. Rest a smaller bowl in the ice water. Pour the cream mixture through a fine [sieve](#) or [chinois](#) (to remove the vanilla bean pieces and [cinnamon](#) sticks) and into the smaller bowl. Chill 3 hours, then continue according to the directions of your [ice cream](#) maker.

Additional Sources

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_cuisine

² Ibid.