

Milk, Spice & Curry Leaves

Hill Country Recipes from the Heart of Sri Lanka

by RUWANMALI SAMARAKOON-AMUNUGAMA

Ruwanmali Samarakoon-Amunugama's (Ruwan's) childhood memories of visits to her parents' homeland in Sri Lanka were filled with colourful trips to the market, lively, happy meals with her extended family, and long, scenic car rides from the capital of Colombo, past tea estates and farmers' stalls, into the hill country around Kandy.

In *Milk, Spice and Curry Leaves*, Ruwan shares the rustic, tropical flavours of these Sri Lankan visits—sweet pineapple and mango, bitter gourd, toothsome cashews, spicy chili pepper, tart lime, and many more—in recipes designed with home cooks in mind.

She introduces the three pillars of Sri Lankan cuisine: coconut milk, rice, and spice, and invites home cooks to dive into more than 60 mouthwatering dishes including:

Coconut Roti	Beetroot Curry
Devilled Prawns	Eggplant Curry
Bitter Gourd Salad	Okra Curry
Raw Papaya Mallum	Young Jackfruit Curry
Onion Chili Sambol	Fried Plantain Curry

In addition, Ruwan walks readers through the steps to make the two foundational Sri Lankan curry powders (roasted and unroasted), provides tips for preparing and cutting leaves, fruits and vegetables for perfect curries and salads and goes into detail on specialty products—like goraka, pandanus leaves, tamarind, and young jackfruit—always with attention to using easily available ingredients.

With lush food photography and styling, hand-drawn illustrations, heirloom photos and ephemera, *Milk, Spice and Curry Leaves* is an invitation to a way of cooking and a family of traditions from the country known as 'the Pearl of the Indian Ocean'.



The Author

While growing up, Ruwan learned about her grandmother's way of cooking, which was typical to her hometown of Kandy, Sri Lanka, from her mother, who exposed her to many ingredients and techniques. Her passion for cooking is inspired by her family's history in farming and gardening. Ruwan's maternal grandfather and uncles worked as agricultural and botanical curators on estates and parks in Sri Lanka's highlands (in Kandy and Nuwara Eliya) and her paternal grandfather owned many fruit, rice, and coconut estates throughout Kandy. Her knowledge of South Asian foods and ingredients has been enhanced by her travels to various parts of Asia and numerous trips to Sri Lanka. Raised in Canada and now residing in Washington State USA, Ruwan has extended Sri Lankan family in Australia. She shares her love of her heritage, food, and travel with her husband and daughter.

Photo by Flora Latfi



92

Pineapple Curry

Amust Malūwa

Fruits like pineapple and mango are wonderful in vegetarian dishes as they have substantial texture. They stand up to the heat of cooking, absorb and enhance the flavour of the spices, and mix well with the bright aroma of curry leaves and the nutty vanilla profile of *pandanus* leaves. With the added heat of the cayenne pepper and the sharpness of the black mustard seeds, this curry will warm your tummy and leave a tingle on your tongue! This is lovely with white jasmine rice, devilled potatoes (page 67), prawn curry (page 126), and bitter gourd salad (page 141).



The fresh pineapple in this recipe cannot be substituted with canned.

Cut the pineapple into bite-size chunks (see page 41). Place them in a medium-size pot with the onion, curry leaves, chili, salt, paprika, cayenne, turmeric, and fenugreek, followed by ½ cup of water.

Cook, covered, over medium heat for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the coconut milk, turn the heat down to low, and let simmer for approximately 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Adjust the salt to taste.

Transfer the pineapple and the coconut milk sauce to a separate bowl or dish.

Now do your tempering. In the same pot (no need to wipe it out first) over high heat, warm the oil and temper (see page 42) the onion until golden brown. Add the curry leaves and mustard seeds to temper.

When you hear the mustard seeds start popping, quickly add the pineapple and sauce and cover the pot. Turn down the heat to its lowest setting, and simmer for approximately 10 minutes to blend the flavours. Turn off the heat and let stand for 5 minutes before serving.

Serves 4-6

1 fresh ripe pineapple (approximately 1 lb after coring, skinning, and cutting)

¼ small red onion

6 curry leaves, ripped into small pieces, divided

1 small green (Thai) chili, diced

1 tsp fine sea salt

1 tsp paprika

½ tsp cayenne powder

Pinch of ground turmeric

Pinch of fenugreek seeds

½ cup coconut milk

1½ Tbsp olive oil

2 Tbsp diced onion

4-5 curry leaves

1 tsp black mustard seeds

As a child, I observed my mother's cooking from a distance, but, as the years passed, I found myself increasingly by her side, absorbing everything I could.

93

I dedicated a notebook solely to scribbling down recipes that had been passed down from my grandmother. Watching my mother use traditional techniques, I learned the secrets to a recipe's success; among them, how to use key ingredients—including pandan and curry leaves, cinnamon bark, turmeric root and coconut—in ways that make our food distinct.



64

White Potato Curry

Sutluu Añā Curry

If you like simple, creamy flavours, you will love this white curry recipe. It is a staple hill country dish, one that my grandmother often served on the lunch table and one that my mother often made at home. This beautiful yet uncomplicated dish is easy to prepare. This curry's colour is a brilliant yellow due to the turmeric. Since it is mild in flavour, it is a great dish for both young and old. It goes nicely with brown or red rice, parsley salad (page 145), and jackfruit curry (page 91). (This recipe doubles easily.)



Traditionally this curry is made with small white potatoes, sliced into evenly sized quarters. You can also use baby or red potatoes.

Choose a waxy potato variety that has a low to medium-low starch content. Many varieties like russet do not work well for curries because they have a higher starch content and become fluffy and dry, almost crumbly, when cooked.

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Cut the baby potatoes in half or if you use larger potatoes, quarter them (and halve the quarters if they are large).

Put the potatoes, onion, turmeric, fenugreek seeds, chili, curry leaves, *pandanus* leaf, and salt in a pot, and add enough water (approximately 1-1½ cups) to just cover the potatoes. Cook, covered, over medium-high heat for approximately 15 minutes.

Add ¼ cup of the coconut milk and more salt if desired, and gently stir to combine the flavours. Turn down the heat to its lowest setting and let simmer, covered, for approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

Finish by squeezing the lime wedge over the curry. Stir, remove from the heat, and let stand for 5 to 10 minutes.

Serves 4

1 lb small white or baby potatoes, peeled

¼ small red onion, chopped

½ tsp ground turmeric

¼ tsp fenugreek seeds

1 whole green (Thai) chili (optional)

3-4 curry leaves, ripped into small pieces

1 inch-long piece of *pandanus* leaf

1 tsp fine sea salt, or to taste

¼-½ cup coconut milk (or full-fat cow's milk)

1 small lime wedge (yielding about 1 tsp juice)

65