



Hemp is a good source of essential fatty acids, particularly gamma linolenic acids; it is a rich source of fibre and minerals. PIC/ANURAG AHIRE

Minus the Manali trance

Ditching its dodgy reputation, hemp is finding its way into Mumbai kitchens and has been spotted in pastas, salads, shakes and even desserts

NASRIN MODAK SIDDIQI

IT'S amusing that the much-touted modern-day mineral resource, said to provide wholesome nutrition, is in fact a 9,000-year-old plant, a species of which is native to the Himalayas. For centuries, those native to the region have reaped the benefits of the sustainable and nutritious Himalayan hemp.

Foods such as bhaang ki chutney (made from hemp seeds), bhaang ka namak (roasted hemp seeds mixed with rock salt, cumin seeds, and local spices; used to season cut fruits and vegetables), and sana hua nebu (raita made with wild hill lemon and hemp) are common in the kitchens of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

When cannabis was made illegal in India in 1985, it robbed farmers of economic security the crop assured and gave hemp a bad name. Its many propagators say it's a misunderstood plant.

In its contemporary avatar, hemp seed oil, hemp hearts and hemp seed powder can be found in dishes like salads, burgers, pizzas, pasta, smoothies, sandwiches, and even dessert. Hemp seeds are the hulled, non-viable seeds of the cannabis sativa plant; and that of other indigenous varieties of cannabis.

When entrepreneur siblings Shalini and Jayanti Bhattacharya were growing up, they'd spend a lot of time in the hills connecting with nature. They learnt about medicinal properties of many herbs and plants, including hemp. "It is both, nutritious and great for the environment," says Shalini, who now lives in Barcelona, as does her brother. "It is proven to be effective against deforestation, and absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Every part of the plant can be used for multiple purposes—for food for humans and animals, medicine, fibre to make clothing, paper and bedding, fuel, as well as construction material such as hempcrete. It's also a biodegradable alternative to plastic." Which explains why entrepreneurs are venturing to create nature-friendly hemp sanitary towels.

Unfortunately, good deeds apart, cannabis sativa continues to live in notoriety garnered by its more rock-and-roll sapling, marijuana.

The difference between hemp and marijuana, says Jayanti, is important to note. Hemp too comes from cannabis sativa, but differs in THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) content. THC is the psychoactive compound that gives the user a high. Cannabis plants with less than 0.3% THC are classified as hemp, and those with more than 0.3% THC as marijuana. "Industrial hemp, the cultivation of which is regulated in India, contains CBD [Cannabidiol, a chemical found in the Cannabis sativa plant] and negligible traces of THC. Hemp is the sober, responsible cousin; marijuana has all the fun."

India has a strong yet complicated connection with cannabis. It is one of the five sacred plants mentioned in the Vedas, and was classified as a synthetic drug and banned as recently as 40 years ago, primarily due to pressure from the US. "Various states in the US are



The Hemp Factory co-founders Dhawal Panchal and Kajal Lahane at the Andheri West cloud kitchen. PIC/ANURAG AHIRE

It took us six months to come up with a menu that Indians would like," says Dhawal Panchal [of The Hemp Factory cloud kitchen]. He suggests we replace unhealthy maida in bakery items with hemp flour; use hemp hearts to add a nutty flavour to milk, gravies, and sweets; and use hemp seed oil for dressings and in sauces



The addition of hemp seeds and oil added the perfect taste, texture and bite to The Hemp Factory's festive special modaks. PIC/ANURAG AHIRE



HEMP SANDWICH

currently revisiting and declassifying it as a drug," Jayanti explains. The siblings use visual story-telling and science-backed research to address concerns about the plant and create awareness about its properties.

The sisters started India Hemp & Co in 2019 and retail hemp hearts (shelled hemp seeds), hemp protein, hemp trail mix and cold pressed hemp seed oil. They also launched a pet line in 2021, which includes hemp treats that are high in protein, and hemp seed oil, great supplement for joint health.

The Hemp Factory, which claims to be India's first cloud kitchen serving hemp-infused foods, serves pizza, burger, and brownies with the green stuff. We tried all of these, and were particularly impressed with the festive special, ukdiche modak. Its co-founder and CEO Dhawal Panchal's connection to hemp is personal. In 2014, when his father was diagnosed with cancer, Dhawal's research led him to cannabis' medicinal avatar. He dug deeper and volunteered with the Great Legalisation Movement, an NGO working to legalising hemp and cannabis in India. In 2017, he joined Bombay Hemp Company (BOHECO), and that's where the idea to start a hemp-related food business struck him. In April 2022, he launched the cloud kitchen in partnership with BOHECO.

Panchal tells us there has been a surge in demand for hemp products after the Food Safety

FSSAI's boost to hemp foods

Hemp-based products have been available in India for a while, but the market was unregulated until 2021. The November 15, 2021 notification by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) allowed for hemp seed, oil, and flour to be sold as food ingredients. The notification requires the cultivation of cannabis to comply with the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS). The NDPS Act excludes cannabis seeds and leaves from the definition of cannabis.

Hemp gin

Satiwa, a homegrown hemp craft Indian gin, uses organic hemp seeds as its key botanical. Founded by Goan entrepreneur Sahil Adwalpalkar, it hopes to reduce the stigma around hemp. "Hemp is a magical botanical that has been ignored for decades due to common misconceptions of it being a drug. When you use the non-hallucinogenic part of the cannabis plant, and use it alongside other botanicals such as juniper, orange peel, cardamom, cinnamon, rose petals, and lemongrass, it produces a distinct nutty note. The divine aroma beautifully complements its earthy flavour," says Adwalpalkar.



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and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI) November 2021 notification (see box). "We thought hemp food had the potential to become a new trend, so we began innovating with the in-house chef," says Panchal. "It took us six months to come up with a menu that Indians would like."

He also recommends replacing unhealthy maida in bakery items with hemp flour; using hemp hearts to bring a nutty flavour to milk, in gravies and sweets, and using hemp seed oil for dressings and in sauces. "Every dish on our menu—burgers, pizzas, pasta, salads, sandwiches, brownies and smoothies—has a different percentage of hemp; on an average, it is 30 per cent," says Panchal, who plans to expand the kitchen through company-owned or franchise outlets, across the country.

When mid-day reached out to nutritionist Dr Geeta Dharmatti to discuss hemp seeds, and she

was all praise for the taste, texture and anti-inflammatory properties of this protein that enjoys enough micronutrient support too.

"It is a good source of essential fatty acids, particularly gamma linolenic acids; is rich in fibre and a good source of minerals like calcium and phosphorus," she says. "A teaspoon of hemp seeds with water or in your salad at the beginning of a meal will help portion control. However, increased consumption can lead to GI distress, bloating or diarrhoea. Avoid taking it along with cardiac drugs or diuretics and consult your general practitioner before starting on hemp. If you are allergic to cannabis, hemp seeds can cause a sore throat, and skin irritation. Also, with no proven research, experts generally advise avoiding it during pregnancy and lactation."

Greenr café in Bandra has been sourcing hemp from Uttarakhand since 2016 from the families of staff who hail from the region, taking tips from them on more indigenous ways of working with the ingredient. "Being a health-forward café, we have been looking at plant-based high protein ingredients," says Nitin Dixit, the co-founder. "Assured of its source, we knew it was safe for use. However, chefs need to master the art of working around its astringent taste. For instance, we use it in our psychedelic smoothies to add protein but the taste must be balanced. The Manali super hemproot pizza we serve has beetroot, whose sweet [taste] counters hemp's astringent aftertaste."

Chef Rahul Sharma of Araku coffee agrees that hemp is a superfood rich in Omega 3 and 6 fatty acids. That it is tied to our heritage and culture makes it a clear top runner in the ingredients list. But because it is fibrous, and has a sour aftertaste, it's a challenge to use.

"It releases oil when it hits high temperatures and gets rancid if left out in the open," he says. "But we just love a good challenge, and have tried and tested the ingredient to come up with hemp nankhatai. We also do a hemp-and-chocolate mousse, and are also working on the recipe for a hemp-and-coffee pie, hemp taco, and some drinks with hemp oil. There is also a dessert in the making where we are ageing coffee with toasted hemp."

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Manali choco balls

INGREDIENTS

- > 35 gm oats
- > 175 gm almond powder
- > 25 gm hemp hearts
- > 1 gm vanilla pod
- > 60 gm coconut oil
- > 175 gm organic brown sugar
- > 30 gm Callebaut dark chocolate powder
- > 1 gm sea salt
- > Cranberries and sesame seeds for garnishing

METHOD

Roast the oats and hemp hearts well. Grind them together with organic brown sugar. Add this mixture to a bowl of almond powder, chocolate powder, sea salt, vanilla and coconut oil in a bowl. Roll up into energy balls with a cranberry heart at the centre and top them with unbleached sesame seeds.



Greenr co-founder Nikhil Dixit and community manager Niharika Jain love working with hemp. PIC/SHADAB KHAN

HEMP
PIZZA

Fusilli pesto pasta

INGREDIENTS

- > 100 gm hemp fusilli
- > 10ml olive oil
- > 100 gm pesto
- > 2 gm pepper
- > 2 gm Italian seasoning
- > 5 gm parmesan cheese
- > 30 gm cherry tomato
- > 3 gm hemp seeds
- > 20 gm olives

METHOD

Boil pasta for three minutes and keep aside. Heat oil in a pan, add garlic and sauté for two minutes. Add cherry tomato and olives and sauté some more. Pour the pasta water into the pan and add pesto. Once you get the desired consistency, add pasta and basil, and transfer to a bowl. Garnish with hemp seeds and parmesan.



Psychedelic purple smoothie bowl

INGREDIENTS

- > 30 gm raspberries
- > 30 gm strawberries
- > 10 gm hemp protein
- > 2 frozen bananas
- > 100 ml almond milk
- > 10 gm almond butter
- > 10 gm organic jaggery
- > 60 ml fresh beetroot juice
- > 1 fig
- > 1 tbsp homemade granola

METHOD

Blend beetroot juice, frozen bananas, raspberries, strawberries, almond milk, hemp protein, almond butter, dried fig and organic jaggery powder together until smooth. Pour into a glass. Top it with your favourite fruits and homemade granola.

GHEE ROAST
DOSA

Bombay-special nasta paani

REVIEW Nariman Point's iconic eatery Swati Snacks is now open for breakfast. Sunday mid-day's pakki Gujarati writer lined up early morning for pet pooja

JALEBI
FAFDA

PHORUM PANDYA

ON a Sunday when Mumbai's skies opened up after a dry spell, we set out on a train from Andheri at 7.30 am, and cabbied it from Churchgate to Nariman Point. That's 28 kilometres in total, but we are not complaining. In fact, the friend accompanying us didn't require any convincing to get out of her pyjamas so early on a weekend.

Swati Snacks' Nariman Point outlet recently opened its doors for breakfast, with a special menu on offer until 10 am. The concise menu packs in a fair bit of variety. Jalebi papad and fafda (₹200) are right up on the roster—it's every Gujarati's dream Sunday breakfast. The steward scribbles down that dish's name even before we have finished saying it...it's a must-have. We chase that with an oats paneer chilla (₹250) and ghee roast dosa with mulga podi (₹195).

For years, townies have lined up patiently outside the eatery to take jalebi-fafda home. Exclusively available for takeaway for 59 years, this is its debut on the table. Served with raw grated papaya chutney and Gujarati kadhi, the fafda are perfect. Crispy curtains of besan, they come topped with an ajwain masala mix. The jalebi, crowned with chopped almonds, was the perfect accompaniment.

The oats chilla has the maledaar zing of the Guju thepla—adoo (ginger), marcha (chilli), methi (fenugreek). It comes topped with grated paneer. We dip a portion of the handkerchief-thin chilla into fresh kothmir-pudina chutney.

This coriander-mint relish, like so many other chutneys made and savoured in Gujarati homes, is the touchstone for a homechef. Sometimes, it earns a moniker that includes the name of the maker, e.g. everyone raves about Bhairavi Ben's lasan-ni-chutney.

Swati's dosa is layered with mulga podi. We overhear the patrons at a table ask the staff if

the podi is available for sale. Ghee-lined and crispy, without an iota of extra burn, the dosa takes a detour from Gujarat to South India.

Hungry still—more in the heart than the stomach—we order a plate of nachni roadside sandwich (₹170). We expect veggies jammed between slices of bread, but the slices of tomato, cucumber and potato sit between two slices of a dhokla, slathered with green chutney. A smart idea to give the Bam-baiyya street eat a Gujarati twist.

Our last eat before the South Indian filter coffee (₹125) is a plate of medu vada (₹165). Four in a big bowl, with sambhar and chutney, they are delicious. We finish our last sip of coffee, take a bite of the banana chips that accompany it, and call it quits. On the way back by road, the construction of the Coastal Road at Haji Ali makes us wonder what the city will look like after the infrastructure overhaul. If it means a faster route to Swati for breakfast, we're waiting with our stretchy pants on.

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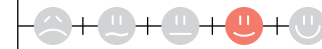


WHAT: Swati Snacks

AT: Dalamal Tower, Free Press Journal Marg, Nariman Point

WHEN: 8 AM to 10 AM (breakfast)

CALL: 249394999

RATING: **GOOD**

Swati Snacks didn't know we were there. Sunday mid-day reviews anonymously and pays for meals

The oat chilla comes with a homestyle coriander-mint chutney

OATS PANEER
CHILLA