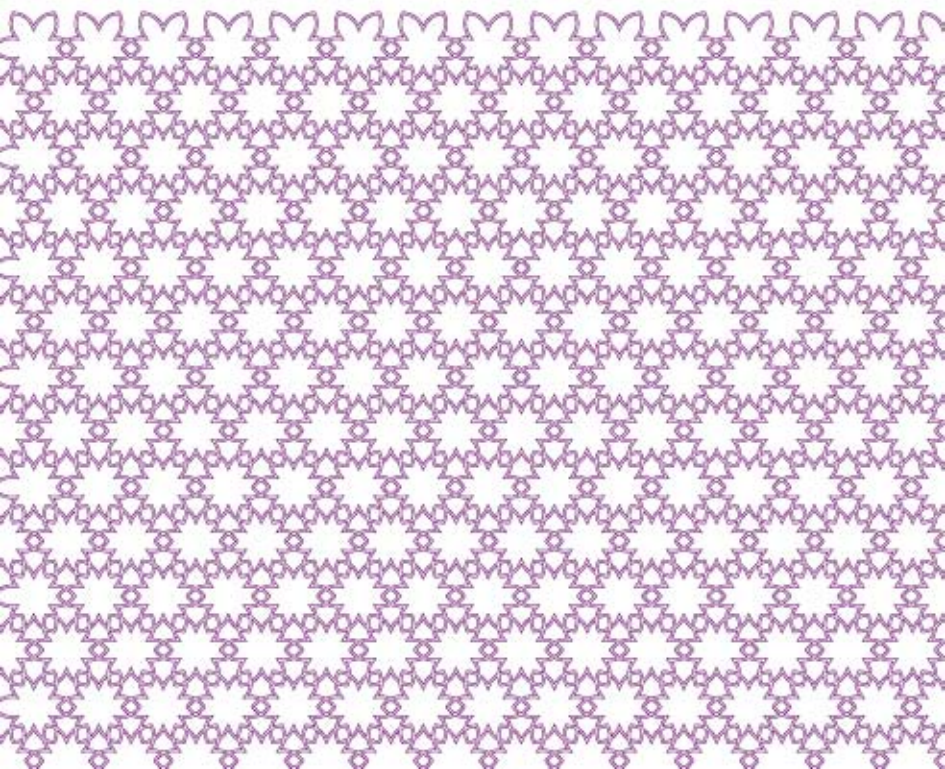




madam krishnan's
south indian recipes



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the spice of life



"Never cook when you are angry or grudging because the dishes will be bitter."

My mum always puts in lots of love in her cooking.



MY LATE MOTHER, AMBROSE KRISHNAN, was my greatest mentor, and a woman of many talents. An expert at all household chores, she could sew clothes, curtains and cushion covers, grew vegetables and fruits in our front yard, and could even assist midwives in childbirth for fellow womenfolk in our kampong. She was also a self-made cook who learnt fast and was able to recreate dishes just by tasting the dish, even if that dish was new to her. It has always been intriguing for me to think how she mastered all those recipes without recording them in any form—just by memory.

My mum grew up in a French convent in the early 1930s, where she learnt to cook western food as well as local delights from the Hainanese chef who worked there. Her family hailed from Pondicherry, a French colony in South India, which was why most of her dishes had some French influence. My maternal great-grandmother was from Mauritius, and so Mum had some Creole dishes in her repertoire as well. My father's family was from Kerala, and when they got married, my mum had to learn Keralite cooking fast to please her husband's and her in-law's palates. Since young, my siblings and I had the best of both worlds, enjoying choice cuisine from both Kerala and Pondicherry.

I grew up in a family of eight children, and we lived in a pre-war house in Singapore shared by many families from different ethnic backgrounds who rented rooms there. Growing up, I remember many occasions where neighbours, friends and relatives would gather at our home just to savour Mum's cooking. This was so even after we grew up. My mum was a gregarious person who was always welcoming and happily shared food with relatives and neighbours—even if it meant that she had to buy



My mum, my sister, Pushpa and I

more ingredients and spend more time whipping up dishes in the kitchen.

When I was young, my family celebrated Onam, a festival celebrated by the Malayalees (people from Kerala) sometime in late August or early September. This was a day where my dad would cook 16 different vegetarian dishes, and the feast would end with the traditional payasam dish called prathamam. At that time, my siblings and I could not appreciate the rich coconut based dishes. But the adults who gathered at our house all seemed to immensely enjoy every morsel of the food on their banana leaves.

Christmas was another memorable occasion where all our neighbours would spend their day at our home. Mum would cook up a storm for them and streams of guests would visit our house on that day. She would spend the day mostly in the kitchen cooking away, but still managed to find time in between her cooking and washing to come out and entertain our guests with such joy and warmth. Mum never grumbled or complained of the endless work she had to do. At the end of the day, our neighbours would help in washing and cleaning up. To thank them for their help, my parents would make the second day of Christmas a ladies' get-together day. Mum would make sheep liver curry for the adults and minced meat stew for the children while the ladies had beer and enjoyed the day chatting and cracking jokes. These memories still linger in my mind even though it happened more than half a century ago.



My grandmother and I

Later when we grew up, my elder siblings started to work and one by one we all left the kampong and moved to our own place. I looked forward to weekends when my siblings and their families would gather at Mum's place. The house would be filled with so much joy and laughter as we took turns to perform or sing the latest hits before tucking in to a sumptuous meal prepared by mum. Those days—with love and delicious home-cooked food to bond us—were truly a taste of heaven.

I got married to Jacob Sagaram in 1973, and we have since been happily married for over 38 years. He used to work as an Environmental Health officer in the then Ministry of the Environment, where he had to inspect restaurants and hawker centres. As such, Jacob never favoured eating out, knowing the possible danger and uncertainty of hawker food. As a result, I had to cook our meals every day, which helped improve my cooking skills tremendously. In our early years of marriage, Jacob never complained once when the dishes I cooked did not turn out as it should. Even when it was obvious that I fumbled the dish, he would tell me that he enjoyed them all. I knew that his intention was to show me support and to encourage me to do better, and this made me strive to work hard on my cooking skills.

I retired as a Deputy Controller to help take care of my first grandson, Mitchell, when he was born. During my free time, I used to conduct cooking classes for domestic helpers through a church organisation. I also conducted cooking demonstrations for various charity functions in schools. How-

ever, after a major spinal surgery, I had to take a break from taking care of the grandchildren and conducting cooking lessons. This was when I decided to take up a diploma course in helping children with special needs. Upon completing the course, I volunteered my services at the Margaret Drive Rainbow Centre for half a year, before moving on to my current job as a Shadow Support specialist in a special needs consulting firm.

My passion for cooking started from a very young age, and all these years, I've collected Mum's recipes in my scrapbook by observing and jotting down her verbal instructions while she cooked. Through trial and error and the experience gained over the years, I have tweaked some of her recipes to suit my children and grandchildren's taste. Now my children and grandchildren gather for dinner at my home every weekend, just as how I used to when my parents were still around.

The dishes in this book are mainly from my mum's repertoire of recipes. I have also included some very traditional recipes from my husband's side of the family, as these are unique dishes that not many are familiar with. Most of these recipes were kindly given verbally to me by my late sister-in-law who knew her brother would otherwise miss it all so much.

For me, cooking is an activity that is therapeutic and brings joy and satisfaction. I especially enjoy treating guests who seldom get to eat home-cooked meals. A piece of advice for those attempting the dishes—please do not be intimidated by the



detailed recipes—they may seem tedious, but I am confident that you will not regret the results of your labour.

My mum has been a model to me in her generosity with sharing food and her knowledge on how to prepare them with anyone who has an interest. The ideals that my mum strived to impart to me were humility and her belief of service to others before self. The small kind gestures and hospitality practised by my parents has also taught me how to show appreciation to friends and family around me.

The most important ingredient my mum always had in her cooking was the great love she put in each time she cooked. This was what my mum always preached, and I remember it to this day: Never cook when you are angry or grudging because the dishes will be bitter. Put in lots of love and say a prayer before you cook for your family and friends so your food will bring them nourishment both in body and spirit.

Before I cook a meal, I remember these words from my Lord: "Do you love me?... Then feed my sheep".

I dedicate this book especially to my grandchildren Mitchell and Gabrielle whom I hope will treasure it as an heirloom from our heritage.

Padma Krishnan

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DRY TENGGIRI FISH HEAD CURRY

This dish was created by Madam Antonia Maurice, my late grandmother and is a dish exclusive to our family.

- 2 medium-sized (500g) mackerel fish head
- 1 cup oil
- 2 big onions, sliced
- 2 tbsp chilli powder
- 3 tbsp water
- 4 stalks coriander leaves
- 1 red chilli, sliced
- salt to taste

Grind together to powder (A):

(leave 1 tbsp for the curry)

- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- ½ tsp fennel seeds
- ½ tsp black peppercorns
- 4-5 dried chillies
- ½ tsp tumeric powder

Tempering (B):

- ½ tsp fenugreek seeds
- 6 shallots, sliced
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed with skin
- 1½ cm ginger, chopped
- 1 sprig curry leaves

Marinate fish head in ground ingredients (A) and salt for 10 minutes.

Heat the oil in a pan. Fry the onions until golden brown then set aside. In the same oil, fry the fish head until brown and crispy, then set aside.

Leave 2 tablespoons of the oil in the frying pan. Lower the heat and fry the tempering ingredients (B). Add the chilli powder, 1 tablespoon of the powdered ingredients and some salt, then stir-fry over gentle heat until fragrant. Add 1 tablespoon of water to moisten the spices.

Add the fried fish head, coating the curry all over it and add 2 tablespoons of water to prevent the curry from burning. When oil starts to seep from the curry and the curry looks dry, add the fried onions and chopped coriander leaves. Mix gently and transfer to serving dish.

Garnish with coriander leaves and red chillies.



FISH WITH FRESH TUMERIC AND COCONUT

This is a traditional dish from Mylapore, South India and has a tangy creamy taste that whets the appetite. I learnt to cook this dish from my late sister-in-law Mrs. Susheela Victor.

- 4 large tomatoes, chopped
- 1 bowl shallots, finely sliced
- 4 stalks coriander leaves, chopped
- 500 ml water
- 1 lemon, squeezed
- 1 kg (10 pieces) fish steak, seasoned with 2 tsp tumeric powder
- 1 tbsp coconut oil
- salt to taste

Grind together:

- 10 dried red chillies (preferably Kashmiri)
- 2½ cm ginger
- 2½ cm fresh tumeric
- 1 sprig curry leaves
- 4 stalks coriander roots

Grind separately:

- ½ grated coconut, without skin

In a pot, put in the tomatoes, half of the chopped coriander leaves, shallots and all the ground ingredients. Add 500ml of water, some salt and lemon juice. Cover the pot and bring the mixture to a gentle simmer for 20 minutes. Do not open the cover while it simmers. Add the fish steaks, put the lid back on and continue to cook over gentle heat for about 10 minutes until fish is done. Add some salt to taste, and more lemon juice if necessary.

Heat the coconut oil in a pan then pour it over the curry. Garnish with chopped coriander leaves.

Tip

This dish goes well with plain rice or idly (p154) and a side dish of brinjal pachadi (p130).

SHARK CURRY



This dish is consumed after delivery and is one of the confinement foods served to new mothers to build up body heat and replenish energy. It helps with the production of breast milk.

- 2 baby sharks (500g each), skinned and cubed
- 10 shallots
- 4 tomatoes, chopped
- 2 tbsp chilli powder
- 2 cups tamarind water (extracted by mixing 1 golf ball size tamarind with 2 cups water)
- 1 cup water
- 2 stalks coriander leaves, chopped
- 1 sprig curry leaves, broken up
- 2 tbsp gingelly oil
- salt to taste

Fry in 2 tbsp gingelly oil and grind to paste:

- 1 tsp fenugreek seeds
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 2 tsp black peppercorns
- 1 sprig curry leaves
- 10 cloves garlic

Heat gingelly oil in pan. Add shallots and fry till lightly browned. Add chopped tomatoes and fry till soft, adding salt to help soften it. Add the tamarind water, 1 cup of water and allow to boil over low heat.

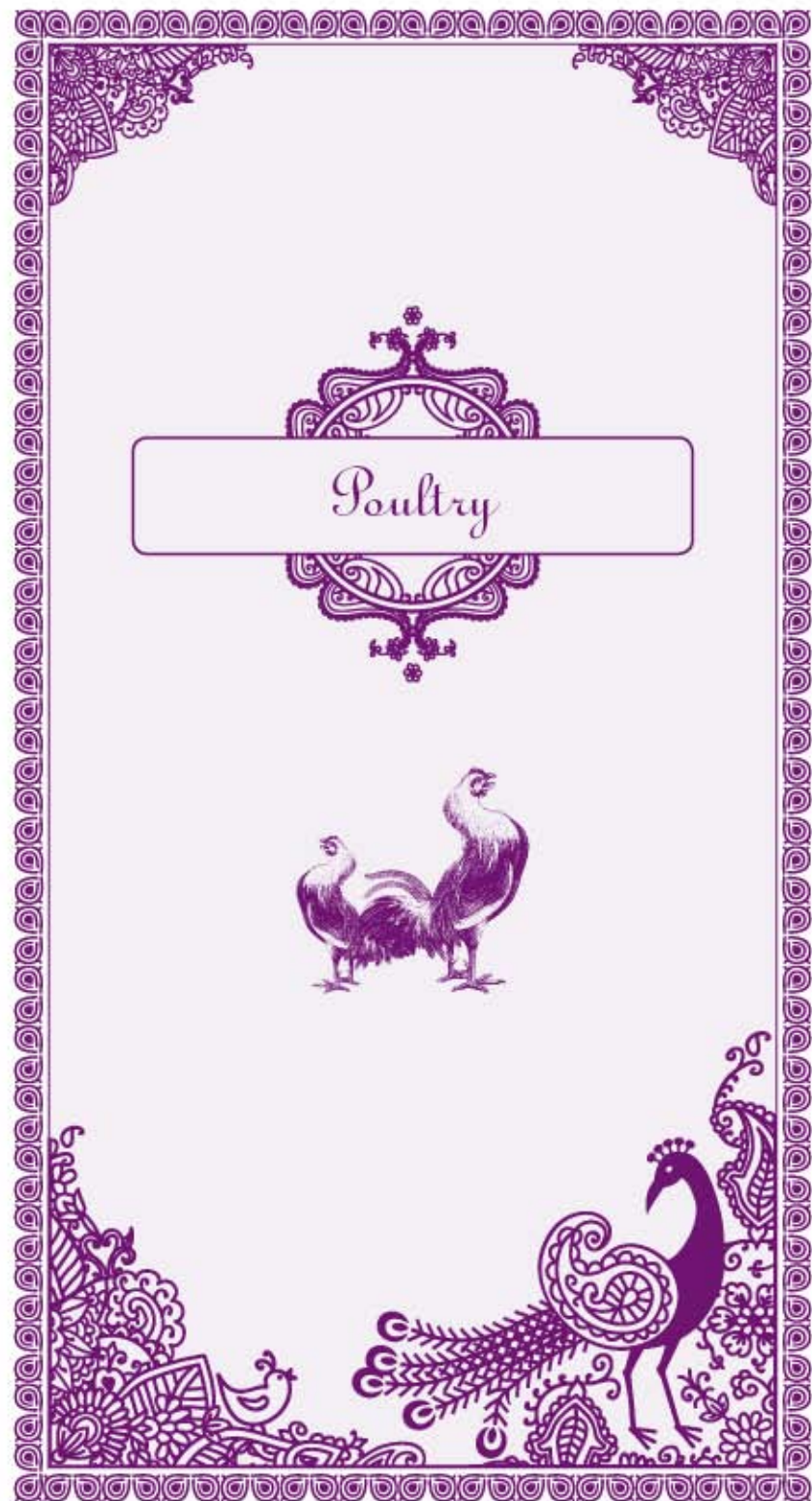
Heat gingelly oil in a pan. Fry the ground ingredients till fragrant then grind to a coarse paste.

When the curry has come to a boil, add the fish cubes and allow it to simmer for 5 to 6 minutes till it is cooked. Add the ground spices and continue to cook the curry for 5 minutes. The curry should be thick but of pourable consistency.

Remove from heat and garnish with the curry and coriander leaves.



Chick size	
	12cm
	11cm
	10cm
	9cm
	8cm
	7cm
	6cm
	5cm
	4cm
	3cm
	2cm
	1cm
	0cm



MASALA ROAST CHICKEN

- 1 lemon, squeezed
- 1 whole chicken (1.5kg), washed and drained
- 1 tbsp dark soya sauce
- 1 tbsp light soya sauce
- 1 tbsp oil
- 1 tbsp honey
- 2 big onions, halved

Grind together to powder (A):

- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp anise seeds
- 1 tsp black peppercorns
- 2½ cm stick cinnamon
- 5 cloves
- 4 cardamons
- 1 star anise
- 2 pieces mace

Grind together (B):

- 2½ cm ginger
- 5 cloves garlic
- 5 shallots
- 1 green chilli
- 1 stalk coriander leaves
- 1 stalk mint leaves

Rub the lemon juice all over the chicken, set aside and allow it to dry.

Mix (A) and (B) together to form a paste, then rub it under the skin of the chicken, as well as in the thigh and drumstick area. Rub the paste inside of the chicken. Mix the oil and dark and light soya sauce together, and rub the mixture over the chicken. Rub honey over the skin of the chicken. Leave to marinate overnight, or at least for a few hours.

Place the chicken in a baking tray lined with the onions acting as the base, and cover it with foil. Roast it in a preheated oven at 200°C for 45 minutes. Then remove the foil and lower the oven temperature to 180°C, and continue to roast for another half hour until the skin turns brown. Cover it back with foil and let it stand for 15 minutes before serving.

VINEGAR ROAST CHICKEN

This is my sister Pushpa's recipe, which she generously shared with me.

- 1 chicken (1.5kg), quartered, washed and drained
- 2 tbsp vinegar
- ¼ cup oil
- salt to taste

Grind together:

- 10 dried chillies
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 2½ cm stick cinnamon
- 5 cloves
- 4 cardamons

Mix the ground ingredients with the oil, some salt and vinegar. Rub this mixture well into the chicken pieces. Set aside to marinate for at least 30 minutes.

Preheat oven at 200°C. Place the chicken on a greased baking tray, and pour the marinade over the chicken. Roast it for 30 minutes. Turn the chicken pieces over and continue to roast for another 30 minutes. Roast till golden and crispy.



CHICKEN JOINT ROAST

This is my mum's recipe, which she learned during her days at the French convent. It is also one of her specialty dishes that is served only on Christmas Eve or special occasions.

- 1 cup olive oil
- 2½ cm stick cinnamon
- 1 star anise
- 1 chicken (1.5kg), cut into 8 pieces at the joints, washed and drained
- 1 cup water
- 3 big onions, cut into thick rings
- 1 small can green peas (or equal amount of frozen green peas)
- 4 potatoes, wedged and fried till golden brown

Marinade:

- 3 tbsp black peppercorns, coarsely pounded
- 2 tbsp tomato ketchup
- 3 tbsp dark soya sauce
- 2 tbsp olive oil

Mix chicken pieces with the pepper, tomato ketchup, dark soya sauce and 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Set aside to marinate for at least 30 minutes.

Heat 1 cup of olive oil in a wok. Add in the cinnamon and star anise, followed by the marinated and drained chicken pieces. Reserve the marinade for later use. Stir-fry until chicken is well seared. Pour in the marinade followed by 1 cup of water, and make sure there is enough water to cover the chicken. Stir and mix well.

Cover the wok and cook the chicken over gentle heat for 20 minutes. Check occasionally to see if more water is needed. Remove the lid and stir-fry till gravy is absorbed into the chicken and oil oozes from the gravy. When the chicken is done, add onions then green peas and mix well.

Remove from heat and garnish with fried potatoes.

AMBROSE'S CHICKEN PARATEL DRY CHICKEN CURRY

Whenever my mum cooks this dish, all our neighbours would know because the strong fragrance would permeate throughout the neighbourhood.

- 1 chicken (1.5kg), cut into small pieces, washed and drained
- 1 cup water
- 1 tbsp oil
- 2½ cm stick cinnamon
- 3 cloves
- 3 cardamons
- 1 star anise
- 1 sprig curry leaves
- 3 big onions, sliced
- 2½ cm ginger, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed with skin
- 1 tbsp chilli powder
- 1 tsp fennel seeds, coarsely pounded
- 2 stalks coriander leaves, chopped

Marinade:

- 1 tsp tumeric powder
- 2 tbsp chilli powder
- 1 tsp salt

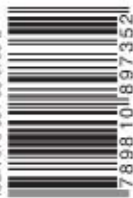
Marinate chicken pieces with tumeric powder, 2 tablespoons of chilli powder and salt for 10 minutes.

Put the chicken in a pot and pour in 1 cup of water. Cover the pot and cook over gentle heat for 5 minutes to allow chicken to absorb the spices. When done, remove chicken and set aside. Add some water into the pot, then scrape the residue and gravy that is left at the bottom of the pot. Keep this gravy for later use.

Heat oil in a wok, add in the cinnamon, cloves, cardamon, star anise and curry leaves. Add the sliced onion, ginger and garlic, and fry till onion turns lightly golden. Add the chicken and stir-fry all the ingredients till well mixed. Add 1 tablespoon of chilli powder and the fennel, then mix well. Pour the gravy kept from earlier to the chicken in the wok. Continue stir-frying until the gravy becomes thick and chicken is cooked.

Garnish with coriander leaves and serve hot.

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