

RANCHO GORDO presents

INDIAN BEAN RECIPES: TRADITIONAL AND NOT-SO TRADITIONAL



by Arnab Chakladar

INTRODUCTION

My family moved all over India during my childhood in the 1970s and 1980s. For my mother, who was born and raised in Bengal and only learned to cook after her marriage, this meant that Bengali dishes and approaches often hybridized unpredictably in her kitchen with those she encountered in the homes of other families on the air force stations we lived in. My own cooking emerged almost entirely from my mother's — taught a little in person in my late teens and early 20s in India and then, after I moved to the U.S. in 1993, in letters, on the phone, by email, and finally over WhatsApp. So it is not a surprise that, in addition to many of her recipes, I seem to have inherited an attitude toward cooking: sometimes making things in more or less traditional ways; sometimes making them, as my mother would say, "with my own idea," which mostly involves borrowing and mixing elements from different Indian regional traditions — and sometimes from further beyond.

The recipes in this ebook and on my blog reflect that attitude: They are a mix of dishes: Some that resemble traditional versions more closely, some where you can make out a family resemblance to a traditional dish, and others where you have to squint quite a bit. The headnotes to the recipes will give you a sense of which is which.

A NOTE ON INGREDIENTS

A few of the ingredients required in these recipes are unlikely to be found outside South Asian pantries. The good news is that if you live in a large metropolitan area in the U.S., there are almost certainly many South Asian groceries within easy reach where you can find all these things. If you don't live in one of these areas, there are many places to buy them online.

You will need the following spices and herbs to make all the recipes in this booklet:

- Black peppercorns (kali mirch in Hindi)
- Dried cassia leaves (tez patta in Hindi; also known as Indian bay leaf)
- Dried hot red chiles, whole and powdered (lal mirch in Hindi)
- Cassia bark or cinnamon (dalchini in Hindi)
- Coriander seeds (dhania in Hindi)
- Cumin seeds (zeera in Hindi)
- Curry leaves (kadi patta in Hindi; these leaves are dark and glossy and not to be confused with the curry herb/plant whose sprigs are much smaller)
- Fennel seeds (saunf in Hindi)
- Ginger powder (sonth in Hindi)
- Turmeric powder (haldi in Hindi)
- Jaggery (unrefined cane or palm sugar — dark brown sugar is a plausible substitute)
- Kashmiri chile (Kashmiri mirch in Hindi; a large mild chile used more for color than heat)
- Kasturi methi (dried methi/ fenugreek leaves — not interchangeable with methi seeds)
- Fenugreek seeds (methi in Hindi)
- Mustard seeds (the black/dark brown variety)

#1. ALU-CHHOLE CHAAT

Serves 4 to 6 as a snack, or 2 to 4 as a first or second course

Chaat is quintessential snack food in India, rarely eaten as part of a larger meal, though it can make for a meal in itself. This recipe, centered on potatoes (alu) and garbanzo beans (chhole), features chaat's usual mix of textures (soft, crisp, crunchy) and flavors (tart, sweet, hot, salty). The recipe for the tamarind chutney, which is a crucial part, is a bonus: You can save and use the rest as a condiment for all kinds of fried things, as a topping for chana masala, and also as a salad dressing. My recipe uses block tamarind, which is available in many Asian stores — I do not recommend using liquid tamarind concentrate. If you want to add more crunch to the chaat, buy a small packet of sev — a crispy noodle snack made of chickpea flour — when you go to get the tamarind and sprinkle some over the top at the end. If you want to get fancy, you can also toss in some pomegranate seeds.

FOR THE TAMARIND CHUTNEY:

4 ounces tamarind, from a block

1½ cups water, just off the boil

¾ teaspoon cumin seeds

Up to 1 cup sugar

½ teaspoon hot chile powder

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

½ teaspoon ginger powder

Salt, to taste

FOR THE ALU AND CHHOLE:

2 cups cooked Rancho Gordo garbanzo beans, drained

1 pound waxy yellow potatoes, boiled, peeled, and cubed

1 small red onion, chopped

1 to 2 Thai chiles, minced (for less heat, substitute

1 jalapeño)

Juice of ½ a lime

¼ cup cilantro, minced

2 tablespoons fresh mint leaves, minced

12 tablespoons Tamarind Chutney (divided use)

4 to 6 tablespoons beaten yogurt

Salt to taste

FOR THE TAMARIND CHUTNEY:

1. Soak the tamarind in the hot water for about an hour.
2. Meanwhile, toast the cumin seeds in a skillet over medium-low heat till they just begin to darken and become aromatic. Cool and grind coarsely. Set aside.
3. After the tamarind has softened considerably, use your fingers to pulp it. As you go, pick out the hard seeds and as many of the hulls as you can. Then, with a potato masher, squash the pulp further. Stir well, and strain the slurry into another bowl. Press the pulp in the strainer to extract as much of the liquid as you can.
4. Taste the slurry to get a sense of how much sugar you want to add. Add it bit by bit and stop when it's sweet enough for your taste.
5. Add the ground cumin and all other ingredients; mix thoroughly. Pour the chutney into a clean jar and refrigerate. Stir before each use.

(Note: You can vary the amounts of the individual spices to your preference; add them in sequence and taste as you go.)

TO FINISH:

1. On a large platter, combine the garbanzo beans, potatoes, onion, chiles, lime juice, cilantro, and mint.
2. A few tablespoons at a time, add up to 10 tablespoons of the tamarind chutney, tasting as you go. Season with more salt, as needed.
3. Swirl in the yogurt and drizzle the remaining 2 tablespoons of tamarind chutney over the top.
4. Serve in bowls with additional tamarind chutney on the side.

#2. BLACK BEANS WITH CRACKED SPICES

Serves 8

This preparation of black beans basically approaches beans in the way that most dals are prepared in North Indian cooking. The beans are cooked separately with a few whole spices and mixed at the end with a tadka (tempering agent) of flavorful masala that complements the intrinsic flavor and texture of Rancho Gordo's wonderful Midnight Black beans, one of the varieties I always have in my pantry. The citrusy tang of cracked coriander seeds works very well here. I eat this dish with rice; my partner likes it out of a bowl with sliced avocado on top. Either way, don't leave out the squeeze of lime.

FOR THE BEANS:

1 pound uncooked Rancho Gordo Midnight Black beans
1 stick cinnamon
2 large tez patta (dried cassia leaf, also known as Indian bay leaf)
Water, as needed

FOR THE MASALA:

1 teaspoon coriander seeds
2 to 3 tablespoons grapeseed or avocado oil
½ teaspoon cumin seeds
2 to 3 dried red chiles
½ of a large red onion, chopped
¾ teaspoon minced garlic
½ teaspoon haldi (turmeric powder)
4 tablespoons chopped tomatoes
Salt

TO SERVE:

1 tablespoon chopped cilantro
Lime quarters

FOR THE BEANS:

1. Rinse the beans, and place them in your bean pot with enough water to cover by a few inches; bring to a hard boil over high heat for about 10 minutes.
2. Reduce to a simmer. Add the cinnamon and tez patta; cover and cook till almost done. Add more hot water from a kettle along the way, as needed, to keep the beans covered.

FOR THE MASALA:

1. Give the coriander a 1- or 2-second whirl in a spice grinder — just enough to crack the seeds but not grind them to a powder.
2. Heat the oil in a small skillet over medium heat and add the cumin seeds.
3. As soon as the cumin begins to become aromatic, add the dried chiles; stir to make sure they don't burn — you just want them to puff up.
4. Once the cumin seeds split, add the onion and sauté till it begins to brown around the edges.
5. Add the garlic and sauté for another minute.
6. Add the turmeric and cracked coriander seeds and sauté for another minute.
7. Add the tomatoes and salt; cook everything down till the oil separates.

TO FINISH:

1. Add the contents of the skillet to the almost-cooked beans. Stir to combine and simmer a little longer till the beans are completely done. At the end, the beans should just be peeping over the pot liquor.
2. Garnish with chopped cilantro, squeeze some lime over, and eat out of a bowl or with rice (or chapatis or tortillas, if you prefer).

#3. WHITE BEAN STEW WITH CUMIN AND GINGER

Serves 8

This is a recipe designed to marry the milder taste of white beans with a rich and warming base. There aren't a lot of ingredients here but it's remarkable what you can do with good beans, onion, ginger, and a few spices. In a bit of a departure from the norm, the role of souring agent here is played not by tomatoes or tamarind but balsamic vinegar. You could just as well call this a curry and eat it over rice; in our house, we end up devouring it right out of a bowl. It's particularly heartwarming in the winter but you can enjoy it all year long.

FOR THE BEANS:

1 pound uncooked Rancho Gordo Ayocote Blanco beans, or similar white beans
Water, as needed

FOR THE MASALA:

2 tablespoons grapeseed or avocado oil
1 medium yellow onion, halved and thinly sliced
1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
The following spices, ground together to a fine powder:
1 tablespoon cumin seeds
½ tablespoon whole black peppercorn
1 Kashmiri chile or other mild chile
½ teaspoon haldi (turmeric powder)
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon jaggery or brown sugar
Salt, to taste

FOR THE BEANS:

1. Rinse and soak the beans in your bean pot, overnight or for 8 hours.
2. Add enough water to the soaked beans to cover by a couple of inches; bring to a rapid boil for 10 minutes.
3. Add more hot water from a kettle to cover the beans by a couple of inches; lower to a simmer, cover and cook till the beans are almost done.
4. Keep adding hot water as necessary to keep the beans covered. At the end, the beans should just be peeping over the pot liquor.

FOR THE MASALA:

1. Heat the oil over medium heat in a small skillet, and add the sliced onion; sauté over medium-low heat for 7 to 10 minutes or till the onions are soft and nicely browned.
2. Add the ginger, raise the heat to medium, and sauté for another minute or so.
3. Add the powdered spice mix, the haldi, and the salt; stir to combine and sauté for another minute or two.
4. Add the vinegar and the sugar, reduce the heat to medium-low again, and sauté till the oil separates. Take care not to let the onions scorch.

TO FINISH:

1. When the beans are almost done, add the contents of the skillet to the bean pot. Stir to combine, raise to a high simmer, and cook for another 10 to 15 minutes.
2. Remove from heat and let it sit for 15 to 30 minutes to let the flavors combine fully.

Serve in a bowl or with steamed rice, or with a hot tortilla or chapati or two.

#4. RED BEAN CURRY WITH COCONUT MILK

Serves 8

The inspiration for this dish — which I first posted on my blog back in 2015 — comes from the South Indian state of Kerala, where similar but not identical preparations are used both for curries made with chickpeas and for fish and meat. I wanted to make a curry that would show off the dramatic beauty of Rancho Gordo's Scarlet Runner beans, and this delivers in spades, both aesthetically and in terms of flavor. If you don't have Scarlet Runners, something like Christmas Lima would work well too, as would Royal Corona or another large white bean.

FOR THE BEANS:

1 pound uncooked Rancho Gordo Scarlet Runner beans, or another large bean like Christmas Lima or Royal Corona

Water, as needed

Pork or ham bones (optional)

FOR THE CURRY:

2 tablespoons grapeseed or avocado oil

1 large red onion, sliced

1 teaspoon freshly grated ginger

1 teaspoon freshly grated garlic

The following spices, ground together to a coarse powder:

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

½ teaspoon coriander seeds

½ teaspoon whole black peppercorns

A 1-inch piece of cinnamon

1 to 3 dried hot red chiles

½ teaspoon haldi (turmeric powder)

1 pinch brown mustard seeds

1 pinch methi (fenugreek seeds)

1½ cups chopped tomato

Salt, to taste

2 cups coconut milk

1 teaspoon sugar

TO FINISH:

1 tablespoon grapeseed or avocado oil

2 tablespoons minced shallot

1 sprig curry leaves

FOR THE BEANS:

1. Rinse and soak the beans in your bean pot, overnight or for 8 hours.
2. Add enough water to the soaked beans to cover them by 2 to 3 inches. Add the bones (if using) and bring to a boil for 10 minutes.
3. Skim any scum that emerges from the bones. Reduce heat to a simmer, cover, and cook till the beans are almost done. (They'll be just a bit firm in the middle.)

FOR THE CURRY:

1. Heat the oil in a skillet over medium heat; add the onions, and sauté for a couple of minutes till they begin to brown lightly around the edges.
2. Add the ginger and garlic; stir for another minute.
3. Reduce the heat to medium-low and add the powdered spices. Stir for another minute.
4. Increase the heat to medium; add the tomatoes and salt, and cook till the oil begins to separate.
5. Add the contents of the skillet to the beans; stir to combine, and cook till the sauce has thickened a bit. (It should have the consistency of a thick stew.)
6. Add the coconut milk and sugar; stir to combine. Increase the heat to high and bring to a boil; simmer until the beans are completely done.

TO FINISH:

1. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a small skillet; add the minced shallot and curry leaves. Sauté for a minute or so, till the shallot has just begun to soften.
2. Pour the contents of the skillet over the cooked beans, and stir to combine; serve the curry with rice or by itself in a bowl.

#5. CHICKEN CURRY WITH CHHOLE

Serves 8

I first encountered chicken curry made with chick-peas rather late in life. It was in 2017, at Lahore Kebab House and Tayyabs, the venerable Pakistani restaurants in London's Whitechapel neighborhood. As such, this dish is lodged in my head as a Pakistani Punjabi dish but versions doubtless exist in Indian Punjab as well, and perhaps elsewhere in the country. I quite enjoyed Tayyabs' version and, over the years, have made a few versions of my own. A little twist here is the use of a chipotle chile in adobo to add a mild smokiness. This is really two recipes for the price of one — you could easily leave out the garbanzo beans and have a tasty chicken curry that may well remind you a bit of chicken tikka masala.

FOR THE CHICKEN:

½ teaspoon haldi (turmeric powder)
½ teaspoon mild or hot chile powder
A pinch of salt
½ cup plain yogurt
2 pounds boneless chicken thighs, cut into chunks

FOR THE CURRY:

4 tablespoons grapeseed or avocado oil (divided use)
1 large red onion, thinly sliced
1 teaspoon freshly pounded ginger
1 teaspoon freshly pounded garlic
½ teaspoon haldi (turmeric powder)
The following spices, lightly toasted, cooled, and ground together to a fine powder:
A 1-inch piece cinnamon
1 teaspoon cumin seeds
1 teaspoon coriander seeds
1 teaspoon fennel seeds
1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
½ teaspoon methi (fenugreek seeds)
1 to 2 Kashmiri chiles (or other mild dried chile of choice)
2 cups chopped tomato
Salt
1 chipotle chile in adobo sauce
½ teaspoon kasturi methi (dried fenugreek leaves)
4 cups chicken stock
1 teaspoon jaggery or brown sugar
2 cups cooked Rancho Gordo garbanzo beans, drained
1 tablespoon chopped cilantro

TO MARINATE THE CHICKEN:

1. In a large bowl, mix the haldi, chile powder, salt, and yogurt thoroughly; add the chicken and mix thoroughly again to coat.
2. Place the covered bowl in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours. Bring to room temperature before beginning with the next steps.

TO MAKE THE CURRY:

1. Heat two tablespoons of the oil over medium heat in a large saucepan; add the onions. Sauté till onions are softened and nicely browned.
2. Add the ginger and garlic; sauté for another minute or so, until the raw aroma is gone.
3. Reduce the heat to medium-low; add the haldi and the ground spices. Stir to combine and sauté for another minute.
4. Add the tomato and salt, increase the heat to medium, and sauté, stirring often, till the tomato has completely broken down and the oil separates.
5. Scrape the contents of the pan into a blender jar. When cooled, add the chipotle chile to the jar, and blend to a smooth puree. Set aside.
6. Heat the remaining oil in the pan over medium heat; add the chicken with all its marinade.
7. Sauté the chicken for 5 to 7 minutes, stirring constantly.
8. Add the tomato-spice puree to the chicken; stir to combine and sauté, stirring often, till the oil separates again.
9. Crumble the kasturi methi into the pan; stir to combine.
10. Pour a little of the stock into the blender jar to loosen the last bits of the puree, and add to the pan along with the sugar and the remaining stock. Increase the heat to a high simmer and cook till the chicken is almost done (probably another 15 to 20 minutes). If the curry is too soupy, increase the heat and reduce the sauce a bit till thickened but still easily pourable, then reduce the heat back to a steady simmer.
11. Add the garbanzo beans; stir to combine. Cover the pan and simmer for another 5 minutes or so, to let the flavors combine.
12. Garnish with the cilantro; serve the curry over rice or by itself in a bowl, along with hot chapatis or parathas.

#6. PORK AND BEANS

Serves 8

Pork and beans are an iconic combination all over the Americas and I enjoy all of its manifestations. It's not, however, a combination I've encountered in India — though please keep in mind that it's a large country and I've only eaten in a relatively small part of it. But it's always seemed to me that beans would go perfectly in Indian-style pork preparations (the iconic ones are from regions with large Christian populations but pork is eaten all over India) and over the years I've improvised a few. This particular recipe for a pork-and-bean curry came about at the end of this summer when my kitchen overflowed with garden tomatoes.

I used spareribs, as that is what I had on hand, but you can use any cut of pork that has some bone attached. I think it works great with Rancho Gordo's iconic Royal Corona beans, but Large White Lima, Ayocote Blanco, or any other medium-to-large bean would work just as well.

FOR THE BEANS:

1 pound uncooked Rancho Gordo Royal Corona beans, rinsed

Water, as needed

FOR THE CURRY:

2 pounds pork ribs, or another cut of pork with some bone attached

1 large red onion, sliced (not too thin, not too thick)

1 tablespoon crushed garlic

1 tablespoon crushed ginger

The following spices ground together to a fine powder:

2 teaspoons cumin seeds

1 teaspoon coriander seeds

1 teaspoon methi (fenugreek seeds)

1 teaspoon black peppercorn

5 Kashmiri chiles or other dried mild red chiles

A 2-inch piece of cinnamon (cassia bark)

½ teaspoon haldi (turmeric powder)

⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg

2 pounds tomatoes, pureed

1 tablespoon jaggery or brown sugar

Salt, to taste

Water, just off the boil, as needed

2 tablespoons chopped cilantro, for garnish

Lime wedges (optional)

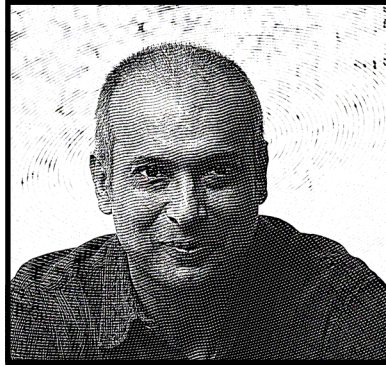
Rice or tortillas, for serving (optional)

FOR THE BEANS:

Soak the rinsed beans overnight or at least for an hour or two. If you forget to soak them don't sweat it; just be prepared for a longer cooking time.

FOR THE PORK:

1. Warm a deep saucepan (stainless steel or enameled cast iron are best) over medium heat; add the pork. Cook the pork, turning a few times, until the meat is browned and a good amount of fat has rendered. Transfer the pork to a plate and set aside. If the amount of fat in the pan seems excessive, drain some and discard. (You'll want just enough for cooking the onions and spices.)
2. Add the onions to the pork fat; sauté, stirring often, till the onions begin to brown.
3. Add the ginger and garlic; sauté for a minute or until the raw aroma is gone.
4. Add the ground spice mixture, haldi, and nutmeg; stir to combine and sauté for another minute.
5. Add the pureed tomatoes, jaggery, and salt; stir to combine and cook till the oil begins to separate.
6. Drain the soaked beans and add them to the pan. Add enough hot water to cover the beans by a couple of inches; stir and bring to a boil for 10 minutes.
7. Return the browned pork and its juices to the pan, along with more water as needed to keep the mixture covered by an inch of water. Bring to a low simmer, cover, and cook till the beans are done. You may need to add a cup or two of hot water as you go, especially if you did not soak the beans first. The final consistency of the curry should be thick but easily pourable.
8. When the beans are done, taste and adjust for salt.
9. Serve in a bowl, garnished with chopped cilantro and accompanied by rice or tortillas, if desired, and the lime wedge (if using) on the side.



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