

Classic British Roast Turkey Curry

can be made either
mild, medium or hot

serves 2

For my Christmas recipe this year I thought I would indulge in a bit of nostalgia and look back to my younger days when curry, for many Brits, meant re-heating the meat from the Sunday roast in a thick and sweetened curry sauce.

Please don't write in telling me that this is a fabricated recipe with nothing whatsoever to do with South Asian cuisine. I know that and so, I suspect, do most visitors to The Curry House. I am not claiming that the recipe describes an authentic Indian or Pakistani dish. It is no more authentic than the curry powder with which it was customarily made by leagues of British housewives.

I make the above caveat because I have been taken to task recently by an earnest British Asian student who resents the use of the term "curry" and how it has been used to represent the cuisine of a whole sub-continent where the vast diversity of ingredients and cooking methods cannot possibly be described by one all-embracing term. I sympathise with my young correspondent and I do try to use the correct regional names wherever possible but there are times when such a broad term can be useful.

This is one of those occasions. There is absolutely no doubt that the recipe below is a full blown, dyed-in-the-wool CURRY. If any dish ever deserved that description it is this one. Why? Because, although curry is probably derived from an Indian word, it is not used at all as a descriptive term on the Asian sub-continent. It was the British colonials who adopted the term as a general description for a huge array of dishes of meat, poultry or vegetables cooked in a spicy sauce. And, as is the habit with imperialists, they appropriated the local resources. In this case they took the cuisine, modified it to their own tastes and then adopted it as their own.

In the process we Brits pretty much ended up with one generic dish known as “curry” which endured in British cooking until the explosion of Indian restaurants in Britain in the 1970’s. After that we began to understand that there was far more to South Asian cooking than merely the sort of curry we were used to. The irony is, of course, that most of the Indian restaurants in Britain did not tend to serve traditional Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi food at all. The food was still tailored to accommodate the British palate. It wasn’t until recently that true regional cooking, such as the new wave of proudly Bengali restaurants, became widely available outside the metropolitan areas of Britain.

I have an Anglo-Indian cookery book, entitled *Culinary Jottings For Madras* by Col. A. R. Kenney-Herbert, which contains recipes similar to this one and which dates back to 1878. The recipes in the book suggest using a home-made curry powder or, alternatively, the commercially made Barrie’s Madras Curry Powder about which Col. Kenney-Herbert enthuses “I am aware of no preparations in the market that can equal them”. Our problem is that the firm of Barrie is no more and that modern curry powders are, in my opinion, almost universally poor in terms of taste and quality.

I prefer to make my own “curry powder” but I would not use it again and again in every curry. No, I would mix a one-off batch just to make this particular recipe. Most commercial curry powder includes ground fenugreek seed (and far too much of it because it is cheap) but I prefer the taste of fenugreek leaves and have used them instead.

A recipe that goes back at least 125 years is like a long lost relative; welcome at this time of year even if it is old fashioned and its pedigree somewhat suspect. Allow me to introduce you to... a Classic British Curry.

ingredients

275g cold, roast turkey cut into chunks – skin removed

3 × 15ml spoons groundnut oil or ghee (use ghee for a really rich taste)

1 medium/large onion – finely chopped

1 fat clove of garlic

1 × 2.5ml spoon of finely grated fresh ginger (+ all the leftover juice)

for the curry powder :

1½ × 5ml spoons ground cumin

1 × 5ml spoon ground coriander

1 × 5ml spoon turmeric

1 × 5ml spoon paprika

chilli powder to taste for a mild, medium or hot curry

(if in doubt, err on the side of caution and add more later)

2 × 5ml spoons gram flour (this is the ground chana dhal used to make onion bhajis)

(or... use ground rice if you can't get gram flour)

1 × 5ml spoon lemon juice

2 × 5ml spoons of syrup from a jar of good quality sweet mango chutney

¼ × 2.5ml spoon garam masala

a few good grinds of black peppercorns

1 × 5ml spoon dried fenugreek (methi) leaves

(or... add 1 × 2.5ml spoon ground fenugreek seeds to the *curry powder*)

salt to taste (probably more than you'd normally use)

method

1. If the cold turkey is in large pieces then cut it into decent sized chunks. Try not to use meat that has been sliced or chunks that are quite small as the meat will break up too easily when you re-heat it. Remove the turkey from the fridge just before you start cooking the curry sauce.
2. Crush the garlic clove in a garlic press and set aside the resulting pulp.
3. Peel a piece of fresh root ginger. Grate the ginger, over a plate, using the cutting holes in the grater that are roughly 2mm across. Ease the soft tissue off the rough side of the grater with the stub of the ginger piece leaving behind all the fibrous bits. Use a knife to scrape the rest of the flesh off the back of the grater. Mix up the pulped flesh and juice, measure your 2.5ml spoonful and add it to the crushed garlic. Save any leftover juice and add it to the curry later.

4. Pour 3 × 15ml spoons of oil or ghee into a 20cm heavy bottomed pan and heat to medium-high.
5. Add the chopped onion to the pan and stir fry for 4 to 5 minutes taking care not to burn any of the pieces.
6. Turn the heat down to medium/low and add the grated ginger and crushed garlic mixture. Fry, stirring constantly, for about 1 minute.
7. Turn the heat to low, let the temperature settle and add the *curry powder*.
8. Gently fry the mixture for a further 30 seconds stirring all the time to prevent the spices from burning.
9. Turn the heat back up to medium and add a little water to the pan. Stir the water into the spices to make a paste. When it's all incorporated add a little more water and repeat the process. Repeat the same process a few times adding just a little water each time. Eventually you will start to get a very thick sauce and you should finally add enough water to create a fluid but not runny sauce.
10. Simmer the sauce, adding a little more water if it becomes too thick, for 20–30 minutes (the longer the better).
11. Now add the lemon juice, mango chutney syrup, garam masala, ground black pepper and fenugreek leaves (if using).
12. Add salt to taste. Test the curry for chilli heat. If it is too mild add a little more chilli powder but remember the curry will take a minute or two to heat up so test the curry again before you add any more.
13. Simmer for a further 10 minutes and get the sauce to your desired consistency by adding or boiling off water **before** you add the turkey.
14. Finally, add the chunks of cold roast turkey and, **with a metal spoon**, gently stir the ingredients together so the turkey pieces are covered with the sauce. Gently heat through the turkey carefully stirring from time to time with the metal spoon.
15. When the turkey is thoroughly hot serve the curry in a warmed serving dish accompanied by a nice [cauliflower bhaji](#) and [pilau rice](#).



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