CURRY

Continued from Page 1B

The bird or birds are simmered in a sauce made with ginger, garlic and turmeric — most Tibetan recipes do not use the bright yellow spice, but this one does. A mere pinch of red pepper flakes creates only a mild, gentle heat, which does nothing to diminish the robust taste of the other well-proportioned ingredients.

Perhaps the most familiar curry around the world is an English curry, the sort that is universally served in pubs. This is what the British soldiers in the 19th century came back to make.

There are many ways to cook pub curry, some involving more than a dozen ingredients and who knows how many intricate steps. I didn't do that. I made an easy curry, from a recipe courtesy of the BBC, and it reminded me exactly of what you get at bars and curry houses all across England.

Because it uses two tablespoons of curry powder, this recipe packs a little heat, but yogurt is mixed into the sauce to help tame it. The creamy yogurt provides the richness to this meal, while the curry powder — and a boost of tomatoes — is the source of its depth.

Curry powder is also used in the curries of China, and I used it to make a stew that is typical of the cooking in Guangdong.

In that province, which we used to call Canton, the stew is made with lamb. I made mine with beef, and as superlative as it was, it might actually be better with the lamb.

But never mind that. If you can't find lamb, or if you don't care for it, the beef is excellent.

This rustic stew is hearty and fabulous, with just a slight hint of sweetness that comes from carrots and rice wine. In some respects, it resembles a typical American stew, with plenty of onions, celery and potatoes, but in other ways it is completely different.

Curry powder has a way of doing that, along with the expected soy sauce, ginger, garlic and sprigs of cilantro.

If you like cilantro, do not forget to add it. Its contrasting note of brightness elevates the stew to something extra special.

I was determined to make these curries without having to go to an international market or specialty store, and most of the Thai recipes I found required such a trip. But then I happened upon a recipe for Thai fried rice using a green curry paste, and I was entranced.

Pieces of chicken — it's a chicken fried rice — are simmered in the curry, and then the other ingredients are added one by one: eggs (which are scrambled into the mixture), rice, peas, scallions, Thai fish sauce and soy sauce.

It is a simple fried rice, but this method of cooking it means the flavors are layered. It's hugely satisfying, comfort food, with green curry paste.

For my last curry, I returned to India to use a perhaps unexpected ingredient: scallops. Macher malai curries are usually made with shrimp, but scallops add an extra touch of elegance.

The scallops are dusted with ground cardamom seeds, mustard seeds and fennel seeds, plus garlic and chopped dried peppers. The beauty of the dish is that none of these ingredients is acidic, so the rub can be left on overnight if you wish. The scallops soak up all of the heady spices and become potent little flavor bombs when they are cooked.

Even so, they still retain their rich and subtly briny taste. And the best part is the sauce, a simple reduction of coconut milk that is used to deglaze the pan.

Does life get better than that? Maybe. But also, maybe not.

Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Dishes made with curry includes this Tibetan Chicken Curry.

MACHER MALAI CURRY WITH SCALLOPS

Yield: 4 servings

1 teaspoon fennel seeds
1/2 teaspoon black or yellow mustard seeds
1/4 teaspoon cardamom seeds (removed from green or white cardamom pods)
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 dried red chile peppers, such as arbol, stems discarded, coarsely chopped, including seeds
1 teaspoon salt
1 pound large sea scallops
2 tablespoons canola, corn or peanut oil
3/4 cup unsweetened coconut milk
1 tablespoon chopped cilantro leaves and tender stems

1. Place the fennel, mustard seeds and cardamom seeds in a spice grinder, or use a mortar and pestle to grind to the consistency of finely ground black pepper. Transfer this spice blend to a large bowl.

2. Add the garlic, chile peppers, salt and scallops to the bowl and stir to mix, making sure to coat the scallops well. Cover and refrigerate scallops until ready to cook; because the mixture is not acidic, you can marinate overnight if desired.

3. Heat the oil in a large skillet over high heat. When the oil appears to shimmer, add the coated scallops in a single layer (you may have to do this in batches if skillet is not large enough). Cook without moving until well-seared, about 2 minutes. Turn and cook 1 minute more. Remove to a serving platter and repeat (over medium heat) with additional scallops if necessary.

4. Add coconut milk to skillet — it should bubble immediately — and cook, scraping up the brown bits on the bottom of the pan, until thickened, about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Pour sauce over scallops; strain it through a sieve, if desired, for a more pleasing appearance. Serve warm, sprinkled with cilantro.

Per serving: 238 calories; 17 g fat; 9 g saturated fat; 27 mg cholesterol; 15 g protein; 8 g carbohydrate; 1 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 1,034 mg sodium; 31 mg calcium

— Adapted from a recipe in "Indian Cooking Unfolded" by Raghavan Iyer

CURRIED BEEF STEW (OR LAMB)

Yield: 8 servings

3 tablespoons peanut or corn oil
2 slices ginger root, minced
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 pounds beef or lamb stew meat, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon rice wine or dry sherry
1 to 2 tablespoons curry powder
1 1/2 cups water
3 carrots, cut into chunks
1 onion, cut into chunks
2 celery ribs, cut into chunks
2 potatoes, cut into chunks
1 bell pepper, cut into chunks
1 tablespoon cornstarch
Salt and pepper
Cilantro sprigs, optional

1. Heat oil in a skillet or wok over high heat and stir-fry ginger and garlic 10 seconds; add meat and stir-fry 5 minutes to brown on all sides. Add soy sauce, wine, curry powder and water. Bring to a boil, cover and simmer 1 hour.

2. Add carrots, onions, celery and potatoes. Continue cooking 20 minutes. Add bell pepper and cook 5 minutes. Combine cornstarch with 2 tablespoons water and stir into mixture to thicken. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and garnish with cilantro sprigs.

Per serving: 316 calories; 12 g fat; 3 g saturated fat; 74 mg cholesterol; 29 g protein; 22 g carbohydrate; 8 g sugar; 6 g fiber; 568 mg sodium; 52 mg calcium

— Adapted from "Regional Cooking of China" by Maggie Gin

EASY ENGLISH PUB CURRY

Yield: 4 servings

6 green onions
3 garlic cloves
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
2/3 cup canned chopped tomatoes
2 tablespoons curry powder
1 teaspoon ground ginger
14 ounces boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 1-inch pieces
1/2 cup plain Greek-style yogurt
Salt and pepper

1. Thinly slice the green onions, reserving a handful of the sliced green parts for garnish. Peel and chop the garlic. Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat and cook the green onions and garlic for a few minutes. Add the tomatoes, curry powder and ground ginger and cook for 3 to 4 minutes. If the pan gets dry, add a splash of water to make sure the spices don't burn.

2. Add the chicken and cook for 5 minutes. Make sure all the chicken is coated and is beginning to brown on the sides.

3. Add 9 ounces of water (1 cup plus 2 tablespoons) and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium or low and simmer 10 to 15 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through with no sign of pink juices in the middle of the pieces.

4. Take the curry off the heat, stir in the yogurt and season with salt and pepper. If the yogurt curdles, remove the chicken and mix the sauce in a blender. Serve warm with rice.

Per serving: 298 calories; 15 g fat; 4 g saturated fat; 90 g cholesterol; 32 g protein; 8 g carbohydrate; 4 g sugar; 2 g fiber; 114 mg sodium; 110 mg calcium

— Adapted from a recipe by Shelina Permalloo for the BBC

EGG CURRY

Yield: 4 servings

3 tablespoons peanut or corn oil
4 hard-cooked eggs, peeled
1 teaspoon minced fresh ginger
1 cup fine-chopped onions
3 scallions, white part only, thinly sliced
1/2 cup chopped tomatoes, fresh or canned
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground fennel seed
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup water

1. Heat the oil in a skillet or wok and brown the eggs on all sides over medium-high heat for about 3 minutes. Remove the eggs and set aside.

2. Add the ginger, onions and scallions to the oil and stir-fry until the onions are light brown. Add the tomatoes and stir-fry 2 minutes to make a sauce.

3. Add the cinnamon, fennel, pepper, turmeric and salt. Stir-fry the mixture for 1 minute, and add the water. Bring to a boil, stirring rapidly for 1 minute, and add the eggs. Cook over moderately low heat for 15 minutes to thicken the sauce.

4. Serve over rice for a side dish.

Per serving: 233 calories; 15 g fat; 3 g saturated fat; 186 mg cholesterol; 8 g protein; 17 g carbohydrate; 8 g sugar; 3 g fiber; 369 mg sodium; 71 mg calcium

— Recipe from "The Varied Kitchens of India" by Copeland Marks

TIBETAN CURRY CHICKEN

Yield: 4 servings

3 tablespoons corn oil or peanut oil
3/4 cup chopped onions
2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger
2 garlic cloves, chopped fine
1/4 teaspoon dried crushed red pepper, or more to taste
2 Cornish game hens, quartered, or 1 (3-pound) chicken cut into 10 serving pieces, loose skin and fat discarded
1 teaspoon salt or more to taste
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 cup water

1. Heat the oil in a saucepan or skillet over medium-high heat, add the onions and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add the ginger, garlic and crushed red pepper. Stir-fry 2 minutes to brown lightly.

2. Add the game hens or chicken, salt, pepper and turmeric and stir-fry for 5 minutes to brown the chicken.

3. Add the water, cover the pan and simmer gently over moderately low heat for 30 minutes or until the chicken is tender and the sauce has reduced and thickened. Serve warm with rice.

Per serving: 217 calories; 18 g fat; 1 g saturated fat; 58 mg cholesterol; 10 g protein; 4 g carbohydrate; 1 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 618 mg sodium; 11 mg calcium

— Recipe from "The Varied Kitchens of India" by Copeland Marks

CHICKEN FRIED RICE WITH GREEN CURRY PASTE

Yield: 2 servings for a main course, 4 servings for a side dish

2 tablespoons oil
1 tablespoon green curry paste, see note
1 skinless, boneless chicken breast, cut into small pieces
2 eggs
4 cups cooked rice
1 cup peas, fresh or frozen
2 green onions, finely chopped
1 tablespoon fish sauce, see note
1 tablespoon light soy sauce

Note: Green curry paste and fish sauce can be found in the international aisle of many grocery stores.

Heat the oil in a wok or skillet over high heat. Add the curry paste and stir-fry for 30 seconds, then add the chicken and stir well, cooking for about 2 minutes. Break in the eggs and scramble well, cooking for about 2 minutes until nearly cooked. Add the remaining ingredients one at a time, stirring between each addition. Serve hot or cold.

Per serving (based on 4): 456 calories; 12 g fat; 2 g saturated fat; 143 mg cholesterol; 25 g protein; 60 g carbohydrate; 3 g sugar; 2 g fiber; 652 mg sodium; 34 mg calcium

— Adapted from "The Big Book of Thai Curries" by Vatcharin Bhumichitr

ROSES

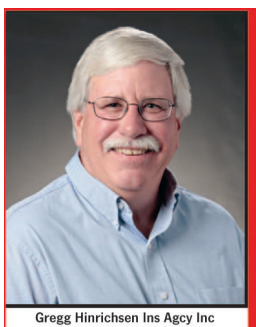
Continued from Page 1B

I plant the bare root rose as if I know it will live for many years. Dig a deep hole, put gravel in the bottom. Put a PVC pipe in the side of the hole, its end stuck into the gravel. Drive a piece of rebar into the ground a ways, next to the PVC, and tie them together in a couple places with cable ties. You'll be watering the rose directly to the roots, watering using a transmission funnel (from auto parts store) stuck into the protruding end of the PVC pipe. Just run a slow stream of water through the hose, stuck into the funnel, and let the water run 10 to 15 minutes to soak the roots each week.

When back-filling the hole I add some slow-release fertilizer like osmocote with its middle number 18. (NPK number like 8-18-8) or something like that. This slowly releases over nine months.

The icing on the cake for me planting either potentially big roses and trees is to run a cage of hardware cloth around the outside of the rebar, forming a protective cage around your plant. I picture it frustrating all deer in the area. Remember, roses are deer candy.

If you have garden questions or comments, please write to greengardencolumn@yahoo.com. Thanks for reading!



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