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Traditional Thai Cuisine
by Owner and Chef Pismai

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Hallelujah! Carrot Halwa

Traditional sweets taste like back home.

Growing up, you know how food should taste. The problems arise when you move away and then try to replicate your favorite flavors in your own kitchen.

As a newlywed and transplant to Eugene, I'm a little daunted at the idea of cooking Pakistani — what if it doesn't taste like back home? I've also discovered a whole new world of Western herbs: basil, a name always associated with British comedy and Austin Powers, turns out to be an herb, as are rosemary and thyme. Initially, my Western cooking vocabulary lessons seemed complex enough without my worrying about how to recreate my old world with turmeric, coriander and cardamom.

However, I'm starting to feel it's time. Screwing up my courage the other day, I cooked up a favorite dessert with some input from a visiting aunt and a couple of substitutions in honor of good ol' American convenience. It's called gajar ka halwa, with "gajar" meaning carrot in both Urdu and Hindi.

Halwa, explains Madhur Jaffrey, the goddess of Indian cookbooks, is a sweet dish of grated vegetables or whole wheat cooked in milk, which originated in the Middle East and gained popularity in Asia.

Carrot halwa makes a grand appearance at big banquets and weddings in Pakistan, often slathered with ghee and nuts. Home-made versions tend to go

lighter on the grease and keep flavors more fresh. A favorite in the Punjab for centuries, it can be found on Indian and Pakistani tables alike.

This convenient recipe is fairly quick, taking no more than 30 minutes. What you will have in the end is an extremely fragrant dessert, with wafting cardamom and rose perfume. It's a pleasure just to sniff the pan after you're done. Serve it hot or cold.

You will need:

- 2 pounds of the juiciest carrots you can find, peeled and grated** (My aunt scoffs at American carrots, recommending you take out their tough core before grating; I used organic and left the core in)
- 1 c. powdered milk, full or nonfat**
- 2 Tbs. ghee, butter or oil**
- 6-8 small whole cardamom pods**
- 1 Tbs. slivered almonds**
- 1 Tbs. raisins**
- 1 Tbs. slivered pistachios**
- 2 eggs**
- 3/4 c. sugar, or start with 1/2 cup to taste**
- 10-12 strands of saffron (optional)**
- 1 tsp. rosewater**

Split the cardamom pods open, discarding the peel and keeping the dark seeds. Put the oil, cardamom

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