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Features

Making a curry for fresh Maine shrimp

news@TimesRecord.Com

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Good Seasoning— Eating locally by Season

By Elspeth Pierson, Times Record Contributor — Special to Home & Family

My father is a man on a mission. Two years ago, tucked under the Christmas tree, he found a very fat book, a gift from my mother. "660 Curries: the Gateway to Indian Cooking," he read aloud as he peeled off the wrapping paper. "I will make them all!"

He went out and bought his spices. First he picked up the seeds he'd long stocked in powdered form: cumin and coriander, cardamom pods, mustard seeds. In Indian cooking, he found, spices are often roasted or toasted whole in a frying pan to bring out the flavor rather than sprinkled in powder form. Other times, recipes involved throwing whole seeds or pods together in a coffee grinder or blending them with liquid to yield a coarse, wet texture.

He discovered other spices he'd never kept on hand before: tamarind paste, sour and acidic; asafoetida, a dried powder so stinky some call it Devil's Dung; and fenugreek seeds, slightly bitter, used sometimes to flavor artificial maple syrup. The spice shelf grew crowded; cream of tartar and other seldom used jars were relegated to a musty cupboard shelf, and slowly he built an Indian pantry.

He delved into the book. In the summer he made Lilva Nu Shaak, crisp curried green beans with chopped tomato and fresh cilantro, and Pork Vindaloo, pork with cider vinegar, fresh Serrano chiles, and coconut milk.

Each time my sister or I came home to visit, he made a new dish. Still, he has a very long way to go. In fact, he thinks he has only made 25 of the 660 curries, though he claims there are really more like 125, because each has a vegetarian version, one for beef, one for chicken, shrimp, lobster, etc. If he only makes one version of each, the goal is not so daunting as it seems.

But for now, he's stuck on shrimp. Sweet, tiny, Maine shrimp. A week or two ago, my parents pulled off the Old Bath Road near Fat Boy's and threw four pounds of fresh Maine shrimp on a scale in



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the back of the fishmonger's truck. They ate some fresh and tucked the rest into the freezer. When I arrived for a visit this weekend, we pulled it out. There were, after all, still a few more shrimp curries to try.

My father ground together coriander seeds, cumin seeds, black peppercorns, cloves, cardamom, bay leaves, and cayenne pepper to make a Bin Bhuna Hua Garam Masala — a heady, fresh coriander-curry mix. I minced garlic, and set out the salt crank alongside the stove with olive oil and mortar and pestle. My mother put on a pot of rice. My father coated the shrimp in garlic, spices, and salt, tossed them, and set them aside.

We opened a bottle of wine, good, strong Rioja, and my father heated up a skillet. The rice was ready, black peppercorns and chiles toasted to a smoky gray, and we pounded them to a hot paste. The shrimp seemed to sear in an instant, water and spice simmered into a hot, thin broth, and we sat down to eat.

Later that evening my father annotated the book, and we counted 26 curries, and another success.

Spicy Shrimp with Black Pepper and Blackened Chiles

adapted from "660 Curries: the Gateway to Indian Cooking" by Raghavan Iyer

This recipe is intended to feature the large grayish green tiger prawns so common in Indian waters, but we found it a delicious way to spice up our comparatively tiny Maine shrimp. Two last-minute dinner guests also brought over a fillet of haddock, which we threw in the pan and found very agreeable with this spice mix.

Bin Bhuna Hua Garam Masala

- 2 tablespoons coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1/2 teaspoon whole cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon cardamom seeds
- 2 dried bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- Place spices in a coffee or spice grinder and grind until the mixture has the texture of finely ground pepper. Pour into an airtight container and store in the pantry (do not refrigerate).

Jhinga Masala

- 1 pound Maine shrimp
- 4 medium sized garlic cloves
- 1 teaspoon Bin Bhuna Hua Garam Masala
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 2 or 3 dried hot peppers, or to taste, stems removed
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/3 cup water
- Combine shrimp, garlic, garam masala, and salt in a bowl and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or overnight. Heat up a mid-sized skillet over medium-high



heat. Add peppercorns and chiles and toast, shaking the skillet as you work, until the chiles blacken (about 2 or 3 minutes). Pound peppercorns and chiles with a mortar and pestle until they crack and break open.

- Pour the olive oil into the skillet and warm it back up over medium high heat. Sear shrimp on one side momentarily, then flip and add water and pounded chiles with peppercorns. Stir once or twice, and bring quickly to a boil. The shrimp only need about 2 minutes to cook, so remove them as soon as you feel confident they're cooked through. Be careful not to overcook, as they'll lose their texture. Serve hot over rice.

Elspeth Pierson grew up in Brunswick and is now living and writing on Cape Cod. She studied environmental journalism at Middlebury College, as well as the connection between identity and place. She is excited to continue exploring this connection through researching and writing about local food. Her e-mail address is elspeth.pierson@gmail.com, and her blog is at <http://diaryofalocavore.blogspot.com/>

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