



My Indian Kitchen

Ashia Ismail-Singer

**Delicious recipes for
New Zealand cooks**

Photography by
Manja Wachsmuth



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Introduction	6
Pantry essentials	8
Grazing & bites	14
Light lunches	40
The main event	68
On the side	122
A touch of sweetness	156
Acknowledgements	202
Index	204

First published in 2018 by Potton & Burton
98 Vickerman Street
PO Box 5128, Nelson, New Zealand
pottonandburton.co.nz
Publisher: Emma Radcliffe

Text © Ashia Ismail-Singer
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Photography Manja Wachsmuth
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Design: Floor van Lierop
thisisthem.com

ISBN 978 0 947503 68 0

Printed in China by Midas Printing International Ltd

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Introduction

For the last six years, I have been planning and writing this book, a culmination of my love of food and cooking, and a determination to share my and my family's recipes with a wider audience. I want to show you that Indian food does not have to be complicated and can be easily made at home, with a few core ingredients. The recipes in this book are created to be as simple as possible and I believe anyone can effortlessly make a delicious Indian feast, or just bring a hint of the East to a nutritious everyday meal.

I grew up in Malawi, Africa. My grandparents had moved to Malawi from the Gujarat in India in the late 1940s, after the India and Pakistan partition. With a large Indian community in Malawi, recipes and cooking styles were preserved and shared. There are also Persian influences in our food, with Persians having settled in the Gujarat in the eighth century, so we use rosewater, saffron, cardamom and pomegranates.

Regardless of where I have lived, cooking was always a big part of my upbringing. I was lucky to learn recipes and cooking from my mum. Then when our family moved to the UK when I was a teenager, I began experimenting with different flavours, having access to a wide variety of Western ingredients. My parents loved to entertain, and my mum had no qualms about cooking a biryani for 100 guests, or planning what dishes to be served at a family gathering, with my dad. But it was in New Zealand in my twenties that I truly found my love for food. I missed my mum's cooking, so would recreate her recipes, far from home. Indian home cooking is my soul food; it's nostalgia, passion and comfort.

I am one of four girls, and we all love our food. We share recipes and ask each other for culinary advice. Some of my favourite recipes are those that have been passed down through my family, adapted by each generation to suit the ingredients available. As a busy nurse, mother and home cook, I have further developed these recipes to reflect my own lifestyle and cooking techniques.

This book, dedicated to my beautiful mum, Zarina, is not only full of the recipes she taught me but also ones I have created, trying to recapture the flavours of my childhood, so I can share them with my own children.

I have loved every minute of this journey and I'm delighted to be sharing the recipes from *My Indian Kitchen* with you. I believe that food celebrates life, so I hope my easy-to-cook, authentic, Eastern-inspired dishes encourage you to cook fabulous meals to share with your family and friends. May they help to create wonderful memories with those you love.

Much love,

Ashia



Kebab pastry twists

These tasty pastry twists are great served as finger food at parties or as part of a sharing platter, accompanied with tamarind chutney (page 153), to give them a little extra bite.

♥ Makes 12–14

♥ Prep time 30 mins

♥ Cooking time 10 mins

300g minced lamb or beef
1 small onion, grated
1–2 cloves garlic, crushed
1 tsp grated fresh ginger
2 tsp green chilli & coriander paste
(page 13)
½ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp salt
1 tbsp vegetable oil for frying
2–3 sheets ready-rolled puff pastry,
partially defrosted
1 egg, beaten, for egg wash

Put the mince, onion, garlic, ginger, green chilli & coriander paste, cumin and salt in a large bowl, then mix with a wooden spoon or by hand until thoroughly combined. Divide the mixture into small sausage-like kebab shapes about 8cm long and 3cm diameter.

Heat the oil in a shallow frying pan until hot and then add kebabs and cook for approximately 6–8 minutes until browned. Keep turning the kebabs to ensure an even colour.

Remove from heat and drain the kebabs on a paper towel to remove any excess oil. Set aside to cool.

Prepare the pastry, by cutting the individual sheets lengthways into 1-cm wide strips. Take one strip and wind it around a cooled kebab and place on a foil-lined baking tray. Repeat until all kebabs have a pastry twist and then place the tray in the freezer for approximately 15–20 minutes to set (or keep frozen and stored for up to 3 months).

Preheat the oven to 230°C. Remove the tray from the freezer and brush the pastry with a beaten egg and then bake for approximately 10 minutes or until pastry is golden. Serve warm.



Spicy peppers in tomato sauce

There is nothing boring about this pepper dish. It is crunchy, sweet and full of flavour. Mum always served this as a side to the vegetable pulau rice (page 126), but it goes beautifully as a side to a meat dish and makes a tasty light lunch on its own.

❁ Serves 4–6

❁ Prep time 10 mins

❁ Cooking time 15 mins

1 tbsp oil
¼ tsp cumin seeds
¼ tsp mustard seeds
3 capsicums, deseeded and sliced
4 tbsp tomato passata or blended,
chopped tomatoes
¼ tsp turmeric
¼ tsp ground coriander
¼ tsp garlic powder
¼ tsp ground cumin
¼ tsp salt

Heat oil in a saucepan and add the cumin and mustard seeds. When they start changing colour, add the capsicums and cook for 5 minutes.

Add the tomato passata or tomatoes, and all the spices.

Cook on a low–medium heat for 10 minutes or until the capsicums are cooked.



Mung dhal with roti

This was our usual Sunday brunch when growing up. It was a tradition, usually served with fried eggs and hot roti drizzled with melted ghee. You can get an orange/red dhal that is similar in shape and size; this dhal is pale yellow in colour.

🌿 Serves 4–6

🌿 Prep time 10 mins

🌿 Cooking time 20–30 mins

2 cups mung dhal, washed and soaked overnight

2 tbsp oil

1–2 small whole green chillies (optional)

1 tsp salt

1 tsp ground coriander

1 tsp chilli powder

1 tsp paprika

½ tsp crushed garlic paste

¼ tsp ground cumin

¼ tsp turmeric

200g tomato passata

chopped fresh coriander, for garnish

Rinse the soaked dhal and discard the water. In a pan add the oil and fry the whole green chillies, then add the dhal.

Add all the other ingredients (except the passata), stirring continuously. Add the passata and keep stirring on a low heat for 5 minutes, then add about 1 cup of water (more if you want it really soft).

Allow this to simmer on a low heat for about 15 minutes.

The consistency is a personal preference. I like mine almost like a thick soup.

Once cooked to the desired consistency, garnish with fresh coriander and serve with fresh roti.





Akni

Akni (curried rice) is traditionally cooked in a 'deg', a very large pot for mass cooking, and is served at Memon weddings. Weddings were always a big affair in Malawi, and this dish, alongside sweet rice with sultanas and cherries (page 134), would be served at them, the dishes mass-cooked by the older women of the Memon community. These traditions have long gone, but what remains is the beautiful food that was served.

🍴 Serves 6–8

🕒 Prep time 20 mins

🕒 Cooking time 40–60mins

1 large onion, sliced
½ cup oil
1 tsp whole cumin seeds
1 cinnamon stick
2–3 cardamoms
2 cloves
4 whole peppercorns
1½ tsp crushed garlic
1½ tsp grated ginger
2½ tsp salt
¾ tsp black pepper
1 tsp turmeric
1kg lamb or chicken on the bone
6 potatoes, cut into quarters

spices to add

3 tsp ground coriander
2 tsp ground cumin
2 tsp chilli powder
1 tsp paprika

sauce

400g tomato passata
3 tbsp tomato paste

rice

2½ cups rice, washed
5 cups water
2 tbsp ghee

chopped coriander, for garnish

Fry the sliced onion in the oil with all the spices and seasonings. When the onion is golden, add the meat and potatoes. Add the next set of spices when the meat is half-cooked (20 minutes for chicken or 40 minutes for lamb).

Cook on a low heat for about 10 minutes, covered, then add the passata and the tomato paste. Mix in, then again cover and continue cooking on a low heat until the meat and potatoes are cooked. The sauce should now be thick and clinging to the meat.

Next, add the rice, water and ghee and simmer on the lowest setting until the rice is cooked.

Serve with sweet rice (page 134) and garnish with some freshly chopped coriander.



Anjum's spicy roast potatoes

These roast potatoes are so divine and my sister's speciality. Perfect with any roast meat, to add a touch of spice to your dinner. Try them with the chilli-crusted baked salmon (page 70) or the roast lamb with a chilli rub (page 88).

🌿 Serves 8

🌿 Prep time 15 mins

🌿 Cooking time 45–50 mins

8–10 large potatoes, peeled and cut into thick slices (about 1.5cm)

½ cup oil

1–2 tsp red chilli powder

1 tsp paprika

1 tsp salt

½ tsp ground black pepper

2 tsp white vinegar

2 tbsp tomato sauce

1–2 cloves crushed garlic

to garnish

chilli flakes

lemon juice

Preheat oven to 160°C.

Parboil potatoes in salty water until just soft enough but not breakable.

In a bowl, mix the oil, chilli powder, paprika, salt, pepper, vinegar, tomato sauce and garlic.

Line an oven tray with foil, brush the foil with the chilli oil, and then lay the sliced potatoes, spreading over the oil mixture, making sure they are all well-coated.

Bake in the oven for 30 minutes; ensuring halfway through the cooking time you turn the potatoes over to cook evenly.

Garnish with chilli flakes and a squeeze of lemon, and serve with cucumber raita (page 155).



Naan

Here is a step-by-step guide to making authentic Indian breads in your own kitchen. Naan is a delicious, puffy Indian bread made with milk and yoghurt. It is perfect for mopping up curries or having on its own. I love making these. They're best made just before serving, hot off the grill. Traditionally this bread is cooked on the walls of a tandoor (clay oven) but it is not easy to recreate the intense heat in your oven, so the texture is slightly different, but they still taste divine.

❖ Makes 6–8

❖ Prep time 30 mins

❖ Cooking time 30 mins

3 cups plain flour
1½ tsp sugar
½ tsp salt
1 tsp baking powder
½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
¼ cup milk
⅓ cup unsweetened yoghurt
1 tbsp melted butter
¾ cup warm water (approx.)

Toppings (optional)
poppy seeds
chopped fresh coriander
cumin seeds
chopped fresh mint
chilli flakes or a combination
of any of these

Sift flour, add all the dry ingredients and mix to combine. Make a well in the centre and add the milk, yoghurt and melted butter with the warm water.

Knead the dough until smooth. Divide into 6–8 balls. Roll out into oblong naan shapes. In a non-stick frying pan, cook the naan on one side and then place on a baking tray. Repeat this process with the remaining naan, brushing the uncooked side with melted butter (and with the topping of your choice).

Grill until browned and blistered. Serve hot.



A touch of sweetness

'Dessert is like a song – the best ones make you dance' sums up this section for me. Indian sweets can be sickly sweet, but just by adding a touch of spice and flavourings like cardamom, saffron and cinnamon, you can take desserts to a whole new level. Refreshing mango kulfi, pavlova flavoured with rose and pistachios, cardamom shortbread and carrot halva, your senses are in for a treat.

Carrot halva with mascarpone

Halva is a name given to a dense, sweet mixture, served as dessert. If you love carrot cake, you will love this. Indian desserts can be very sweet and this is no exception – sticky and gorgeous. It's very easy to make and we served this at my sister Nishat's wedding, decorated with edible flowers.

🌸 Serves 4

🌸 Prep time 20 mins

🌸 Cooking time 50–60 mins

5 cups milk
250g carrots, peeled and grated
75g butter
175g sugar

to serve
thickened cream, Greek yoghurt
or mascarpone
50g chopped pistachio nuts

optional extras
¼ tsp ground cardamom
¼ cup of raisins

Place milk and carrots (and ground cardamom if using) in a heavy-based saucepan and cook over a high heat, stirring occasionally, until liquid has evaporated, about 25–30 minutes. Keep an eye on it – you don't want it to catch on the bottom of the pan.

Add butter and sugar (and raisins if using) and stir with a wooden spoon until butter has melted and sugar has dissolved.

Cook a further 10–15 minutes, stirring frequently, until the mixture starts to leave the side of the pan.

Transfer to four small (¼-cup capacity) ramekins or moulds.

Cool, then turn out and serve, with a dollop of thickened cream, Greek yoghurt or mascarpone and a sprinkle of chopped pistachios.



Cardamom cake with mascarpone & rose icing

This beautiful cake is dense and moist, full of the Eastern flavours I love: rose, cardamom and pistachios. Served as an afternoon tea, this cake is delicious to share.

🌸 Serves 10

🌸 Prep time 15 mins

🌸 Bake time 35 mins

200g softened butter
3 eggs, whisked
1 x 375g can condensed milk
1 tbsp rosewater
250g self-raising flour
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp ground cardamom

icing

250g mascarpone
2 tbsp icing sugar, sifted
1–2 tsp rosewater

to garnish

¼ cup pistachios, some chopped

Preheat oven to 160°C.

Grease a large, round cake tin, about 25cm diameter.

In a large bowl, beat the butter until creamy and then add whisked eggs, condensed milk, and rosewater.

Add the sifted flour, baking powder and cardamom. Mix until combined, but don't over-mix.

Pour the batter into the prepared tin and bake for 35 minutes or until a skewer comes out clean. Turn out once cooled.

To prepare the icing, beat together the mascarpone, icing sugar and rosewater until it is of a spreadable consistency. Using a spatula, spread onto the cake.

Decorate with crushed and whole pistachios.



lassi

Conceivably the world's oldest version of the modern smoothie, this creamy, yoghurt-based drink is fantastic for cooling you down in hot weather. Equally it's a great accompaniment to a spicy curry and helps with digestion. Our favourite family flavours are mango, salt or rose lassi, but if you wanted to experiment, there are lots of combinations you could try.

🌿 Each recipe makes two glasses

🌿 Prep time 15 mins

mango lassi

500g mango pulp (fresh or canned)
250ml chilled milk
250ml plain unsweetened yoghurt
small handful ice cubes

For each lassi, blend everything together in a blender and serve chilled.

For the salt lassi save the cumin seeds to sprinkle on top and serve.

For the rose lassi, once it is blended, sprinkle the pomegranate seeds on top and serve.

salt lassi

½ tsp salt flakes
400ml plain unsweetened yoghurt
200ml water
small handful ice cubes
1 tsp roasted cumin seeds,
to garnish

rose lassi

2–3 tsp rosewater
1 drop red food colouring
(or less, depending on how pink
you want the colour)
250ml chilled milk
250ml plain unsweetened yoghurt
small handful ice cubes
pomegranate seeds, to garnish



\$49.99

254 x 205 mm, approx. 224 pp,
hardback, colour throughout

ISBN: 978 0 947503 68 0

Stock No: 6252

Published: October 2018

ISBN 978-0-947503-68-0



pb potton & burton