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**W**HEN you think of making a curry from scratch at home, you probably think of spending hours in the kitchen, chopping ingredients and slaving over carefully ground spices and simmering pans. But, if you believe Michelin-starred chef Atul Kochhar, it doesn't have to be that way. In the preface to his new book, *30 Minute Curries*, he claims to be 'on a mission' to convince us that you can cook a curry in less than half an hour.

And the mouthwatering images that accompany the recipes – divided according to the main ingredient; vegetables and pulses, eggs and cheese, seafood, poultry, meat – are certainly tempting enough to make you want to try.

For most of the recipes, you need one of the pre-prepared ingredients from the book's basics chapter: onion paste, ginger-garlic paste, tamarind liquid, onion masala. These are simple preparations that can be knocked up in advance and frozen and, according to Atul, they're a great way of adding flavour in a hurry.

'Cooking onions is often the thing that takes the longest, so using an onion paste gets that out of the way,' he says. He even believes that adventurous cooks could create three dishes in half an hour. 'Start the chicken curry, put the lentils in the pressure cooker and they'll be done in 15 minutes, and something like spinach only takes ten minutes.' Aha, a pressure cooker! Is that the secret of a speedy curry? 'I grew up in India and it's just part of the kitchen there. If you don't have one, you can just soak the lentils overnight or cook them in advance.'

Atul says his favourite bit of kitchen kit is a wok. 'It's so versatile and great for quick stir-fries.' In terms of ingredients he wouldn't be without,

it's coriander leaf, ginger and onions. 'With those three I could create a buffet on a dessert island,' he laughs.

Most of the ingredients in the book will be familiar to anyone who regularly peruses the spice shelf of their local supermarket, but I did stumble across a few lesser-known ones, including asafoetida, a powder derived from the resin of a giant fennel plant, and panch phoron, a spice mix used mainly in Bengal.

But for anyone not familiar with Indian cookery, Atul recommends starting with the kale, spinach and egg dish. 'There's hardly any spice – some coriander, cumin, garlic and chilli – and it's absolutely foolproof.'

His favourite recipe in the book is chicken with coriander and spinach chutney. 'It was a challenge to start with because I wanted to cook the chicken on the bone – it took too long, but then it didn't taste as good without the bone. After three or four tries, I found a way to do it with part-boned chicken breasts,' he says. 'It's turned out to be one of the easiest and most delicious dishes.'

His restaurant and media commitments mean Atul doesn't get to cook at home as much as he would like, but he tries to make sure he's home on Sundays and often cooks with his children, Amisha, 13, and Arjun, 11. 'They're both keen cooks and although Arjun didn't used to like broccoli, I've shown him how you can use spices, marinades and different types of cooking to make it taste more interesting than the usual steamed stuff.'

If you – or your children – feel similarly, the book contains a recipe for broccoli and cashew nut curry and, if at the end of it you still don't feel the broccoli love, you've only wasted 30 minutes.

■ *30 Minute Curries* by Atul Kochhar, £26 (Absolute Press)

Spicing up your life:  
Atul Kochhar



# CURRIES IN A HURRY

Claire Coleman chats to Atul Kochhar about how to make a fantastic Indian in less time than it takes to find the takeaway menu...

## KALE AND SPINACH WITH EGGS BHAJUI PE VEDA

SERVES 4

- 2 tomatoes
- 2 onions
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 3 garlic cloves
- 1 long thin green chilli
- 5cm piece of fresh ginger
- 125ml water (optional)
- 200g shredded kale leaves
- 200g baby spinach leaves
- Small handful of fresh coriander leaves
- 1½ tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp red chilli powder or to taste

- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 4 eggs
- Sea salt

**1** Assemble all the ingredients and equipment. You need a large sauté or frying pan with a lid, a food processor fitted with a chopping blade and a colander.  
**2** Coarsely chop the tomatoes. Peel, halve and thinly slice the onions. Heat the vegetable oil over a medium-high heat in the pan. Add the onions with a pinch of salt and leave them to soften,

stirring occasionally, while you make a paste. You want them soft, but not coloured.

**3** Meanwhile, peel the garlic cloves. Remove the stalk from the green chilli, then coarsely chop. Peel and coarsely chop the ginger. Put the garlic cloves, green chilli and ginger in the food processor, and blitz until a fine green paste forms. Add the paste to the onions and stir until blended and the onions are softened. Stir in the water, if necessary, to prevent the onions

## CHICKEN WITH CORIANDER AND SPINACH CHUTNEY HARI CHUTNEY MURGH

SERVES 4

- 4 part-boned chicken breasts
  - 4 green cardamom pods
  - 2 black cardamom pods
  - 1 tbsp vegetable oil
  - 2 cloves
  - 1 dried bay leaf
  - 1 cinnamon stick
  - 2 tbsp onion paste
  - 4 tbsp coconut milk
  - 4 tbsp tamarind liquid or to taste
  - 1 tsp garam masala
  - Sea salt
- FOR THE CORIANDER AND SPINACH CHUTNEY**
- 5cm piece of fresh ginger
  - 2 long thin green chillies

- 50g fresh coriander sprigs
- 50g baby spinach leaves
- 125ml water

**1** Assemble all the ingredients and equipment. You need a cleaver or large chef's knife, a large sauté or frying pan with a lid and a food processor with chopping blade.  
**2** Get the chicken prepared and cooking as quickly as possible. [Buying skinned and chopped chicken pieces from a butcher will save time, but the important thing is to get pieces from the same part of the bird, so they all cook at the same time.] Remove the skin from the chicken breasts, then

chop them into bite-sized pieces, leaving the bones in.

**3** Lightly crush the green and black cardamom pods to loosen the seeds. Heat the vegetable oil over a medium-high heat in the pan. Add the cardamom pods and their seeds, the cloves, bay leaf and cinnamon stick, and stir until the spices crackle. Add the onion paste and stir it into the oil for 30 seconds.

**4** Add the chicken pieces. Season with salt and continue stirring until the pieces start to colour on all sides. Leave the chicken pieces to continue cooking over a medium-high heat, stirring

occasionally and adding a few tablespoons of water, if necessary, to prevent the paste sticking to the pan.

**5** Meanwhile, make the chutney. Peel and coarsely chop the ginger, then put it in the food processor. Remove the stalks from the green chillies, then tear them into the food processor. Rinse and shake dry the coriander and spinach leaves, then place both in the food processor. Add the water, season with salt and blitz, scraping down the sides of the bowl, as necessary, until a thin green paste forms.

**6** Stir the coconut milk and 2

tablespoons of the tamarind liquid into the pan with the chicken, then add half the chutney, stirring until all the chicken pieces are coated. Season with salt, cover the pan and leave the curry to gently boil over a medium heat for 8–10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until all the chicken is tender and cooked through.

**7** Stir in the remaining green chutney, the garam masala and the remaining 2 tablespoons of tamarind liquid to taste. Simmer for a further minute for all the flavours to blend. Adjust the seasoning with salt, if necessary.



## CAULIFLOWER AND CARROT CURRY GOBI GAJAR

*This dish really reminds me of home and where my family comes from. It is a recipe inspired by the Tibetans who cook wonderful Himalayan cuisine in the highlands of Punjab and Himachal.*

### SERVES 4 AS A SHARING DISH

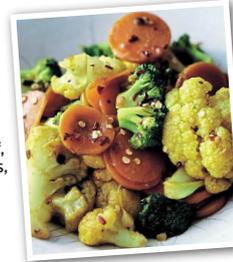
- 4 garlic cloves
- 2 carrots
- ½ head of cauliflower, about 400g
- ½ head of broccoli, about 200g
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp dried chilli flakes
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 2 tbsp light soy sauce or to taste

**1** Assemble all the ingredients and equipment. You need a large sauté or frying pan with a lid.

**2** Peel and thinly slice the carrots, trim both ends and thinly slice. Cut the cauliflower in half, discard the leaves, then thinly slice. Cut the broccoli into florets, then thinly slice.

**3** Heat the vegetable oil over a high heat in the pan. Add the

garlic and chilli flakes and stir to flavour the oil. Pull the pan off the heat and stir in the carrots, cauliflower and broccoli. Return the pan to the heat and stir-fry for 2 minutes.



**4** Cover the pan, reduce the heat to low and leave the vegetables to cook for 8 minutes, stirring once.

**5** Stir in the turmeric and soy sauce and stir for 2-3 minutes until all the vegetables are tender, but still holding their shapes.

catching on the bottom of the pan.  
**4** Rinse the kale leaves, spinach leaves and fresh coriander. Tear out any thick stalks from the kale and drop the leaves into the pan along with the spinach leaves. Tear the coriander leaves from the stalks and add the leaves to the pan; discard the stalks.  
**5** Add the ground coriander, chilli powder and ground cumin to the pan. Season with salt and stir the leaves and spices together for 30 seconds. The leaves will start wilting and shrinking in volume.

Add the tomatoes and continue stirring until all the ingredients are blended. Adjust the seasoning with salt, if necessary.  
**6** Spread out the spinach mixture over the bottom of the pan, then use your spoon or spatula to make 4 indentations. One by one, crack the eggs into a small bowl, then gently tip them into the indentations. Cover the pan and leave the mixture over a medium heat for 6 minutes, or until the whites are set but the yolks are still runny and then serve.

PHOTO: WIRE COOPER





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