

Changing the lives of families who suffer from hunger



Food writer and cookbook author Mallika Basu has put together an easy-to-follow menu to help at-home cooks of any ability put on an Indian inspired feast!

Mallika's Veggie Menu:

Hara Bhara Kebab
Vegetable Biryani
Aubergine raita
Cheat's Paneer Makhani
Gajar ka halwa



Mallika Basu is the author of 'Miss Masala: Real Indian Cooking for Busy Living' (Harper Collins)

STARTER: HARA BHARA KEBAB



'Pea and mint is a match made in heaven, and this kebab recipe is a brilliant way to put freshly frozen bags of peas and spinach to exotic use. Once they're cooked, the kebabs freeze really well too and hold their shape when defrosted and warmed in the microwave.'

Make these well in advance so you're not turning green on the day of your party. And use the fact that all of these are cooked in just the one tablespoon of oil as a party factoid to gloat over.'

1. Cook the peas and spinach according to the pack instructions. Peel and boil the potatoes until they fall apart when probed with a fork and peel the ginger.
2. Squeeze all the moisture out of the spinach. Place half of it with the peas and the ginger in a food processor and give it a good whizz. You should get a smooth mixture but with texture. Tip this into a mixing bowl, with the potato, the rest of the spinach, cornstarch, salt and finely chopped coriander and mint. Go in with your hands and mash the whole lot together.
3. Now refrigerate the whole lot for 20-30 minutes. Then take it out, preheat the grill to a 200 degrees centigrade, line a grill pan with foil and spread the tablespoon of oil all over it.
4. Rub the remaining oil in the palm of your hands. This will prevent the kebabs from sticking to them. Take a ping-pong ball size amount in your palm and fashion the mixture into a little sausage or a flattened disc. Repeat until all the mixture is used up.
5. Finally, grill the lot on the lined baking tray for 10 minutes. Then gently flip over and grill for another 10. Serve hot with tomato ketchup spiked with chilli sauce.

Ingredients - makes 12

- ◇ 6 tbsp frozen peas
- ◇ 6 large cubes frozen spinach
- ◇ 400gm potatoes (about 4 medium)
- ◇ 1 inch ginger
- ◇ 1 handful fresh coriander
- ◇ 1 handful mint
- ◇ 1 green finger chilli
- ◇ 2 tbsp cornstarch
- ◇ 1 tsp salt
- ◇ 1 tbsp oil + 1 tsp oil

MAIN: VEGETABLE BIRYANI

'Biryani is a lavish rice dish dating back to the days of the Mughal Empire. There are lots of different versions, but the one thing they have in common is that the ingredients are layered before being slow cooked, the spices are highly aromatic and it isn't low fat!

My version here is a pared down one, that doesn't compromise on taste, but takes a mere couple of hours including 15 minutes in the oven to make an impression. I also omit the commonly used yellow colouring as it's more for a marbled effect than any flavour. This recipe makes extra, but then you'll be craving this for days'.



Ingredients - feeds 6-8

Vegetable filling:

- ◇ 300gm broccoli/cauliflower
- ◇ 3 carrots
- ◇ 100gm green beans
- ◇ 4 small new potatoes
- ◇ 1 teaspoon garam masala [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 2 large onions
- ◇ 1 small handful cashews [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 4 tbsp oil

Spice paste:

- ◇ 2 tbsp Greek yoghurt
- ◇ 1 tsp whole coriander [BUY NOW](#)

- ◇ 1 green chilli
- ◇ 1 tbsp tomato puree
- ◇ Half tsp cumin [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 1 inch ginger
- ◇ 3 fat garlic cloves
- ◇ 1 inch ginger
- ◇ 3 cm mace [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ Small handful fresh coriander

Rice:

- ◇ 600gm rice [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 3 bay leaves [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 3 black cardamoms [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 6 green cardamoms [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 8 black peppers [BUY NOW](#)

- ◇ 2 star anise [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 6 cloves [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 3 inches cinnamon [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ Half a nutmeg [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 1 teaspoon rose water/kewra water [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 2 pinches saffron [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 4 tbsp milk
- ◇ 3 tsp salt
- ◇ 3 tbsp ghee [BUY NOW](#)

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1. Bring a full kettle to boil. Wash the rice two times in a sieve, then leave to soak in cold water.
2. First make the vegetable filling. Peel and slice one onion and cut the vegetables into small pieces. Puree all the ingredients under the spice paste section in a small food processor using a tablespoon or two of hot water
3. Bring three tablespoons of oil to heat on high in a shallow pan. When it's hot and sizzles around a wooden spoon, add the onions and sauté for 10 minutes until golden caramelized. Adding a pinch of salt will speed things up.
4. Next add the spice paste and cook for another five minutes stirring well. You may add a tablespoon or two of warm water to prevent the paste from getting stuck to the bottom of the pan. Then add the vegetables, lower the heat to medium and cook covered for 10 minutes until they are soft but not soggy, adding a bit of water at a time if you need it to help the cooking. Add salt to your taste, the garam masala, take it off the heat and start on the rice.
5. Turn the oven on to 180 degrees centigrade. Also, warm the milk and soak the saffron in it.
6. Now drain the rice. Bring the ghee to heat on high in a large pot. When the ghee is hot, add the whole spices and as they sizzle up, tip in the drained rice and the salt. Sauté the rice in the ghee and whole spices for a minute until the rice turns translucent. Bring it to boil with five cups of hot water, then cover and simmer for five minutes and take it off the heat.
7. Now layer it all. Tip half of the rice into a casserole pan, grate a quarter of the nutmeg over it and sprinkle half the saffron milk and threads, and half a teaspoon of the rose water (or kewra essence if using) across it in a zig zag fashion. Top with the vegetable filling, and end with the remaining rice, the rest of the saffron with its milk and rose water/kewra essence.
8. Cover the casserole pan top with foil then stick the lid on, and finish in the centre of the oven for 15 minutes. While it's cooking, peel and slice the second onion and sauté it with a pinch of salt for 10 minutes until golden, tossing in the cashews towards the end to toast them lightly.
9. Serve in the casserole dish, with the onions and cashews sprinkled on top. Your guests need to give the rice they serve themselves a good stir before they tuck into it.

SIDE DISH: AUBERGINE RAITA

'Raita, savoury yoghurt spiked with spices, is traditionally eaten in North India with every meal as a digestive and to douse any flames caused by chilli consumption. Cucumber raita, of course, reigns supreme but raita is also made with a plethora of ingredients including potato, chickpea and my favourite, eggs.

My recipe of aubergine raita is a bit of family favourite. Make sure you soak the aubergine in ice-cold water for at least two hours before you fry them to keep the oil they absorb to a minimum and speed up cooking time. And I would really recommend black salt – it has an amazing affinity with yoghurt and you can sprinkle it on eggs too'.



1. Slice the aubergine into 1 cm discs and soak them in ice-cold water in a bowl. I often stick a plate on top to keep them submerged.
2. When you are ready to cook, drain the aubergines well and sprinkle the chilli powder, turmeric powder and salt all over them. I give the bowl a little shake to ensure the aubergines are coated evenly.
3. In a frying pan, bring two tablespoons of oil to heat on medium high. When it's hot, place four-five aubergines in a single layer and cook until deep golden on one side, then flip over and do the same on the other side.
4. Take them off and place them on a plate lined with kitchen paper to absorb any excess oil. Repeat with the rest of the aubergines until they are all crispy fried.
5. When the aubergines are all done, roast the cumin in a small frying pan for 10 seconds and pound or grind to a fine powder. I use a small coffee grinder, but you could use a pestle and mortar too.
6. Now assemble your raita. Whisk the yoghurt well. Layer the sliced aubergine on a shallow dish. Pour the yoghurt over the top evenly. Then sprinkle the chilli powder, the roasted cumin and the black salt evenly all over and stick in the fridge until dinner if ready to be served.

Ingredients

- ◇ 1 large aubergine
- ◇ 1 tsp chilli powder [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 1 tsp turmeric powder [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 1 tsp salt
- ◇ 1 tsp whole cumin [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ Half tsp black salt (Kala Namak, or just use normal salt) [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 250 gm low-fat yoghurt
- ◇ Oil, as needed

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SIDE DISH: CHEAT'S PANEER MAKHANI



'Paneer Makhani is that buttery, rich and decadent dish of cubes of Indian paneer nestled in a creamy tomato curry. I have a cheat's version that creates the sublime creamy texture with Greek Yoghurt and milk. Best of all, it uses ready tandoori masala as a spice base.

After all the hard work that's gone into the other recipes, this is one dish you can whizz up in a jiffy and no one will even notice. You're welcome'.



1. Take the Greek Yoghurt out of the fridge, and mix it well with the milk in a jug. Peel and finely grate the ginger and garlic. You can also puree it with a tablespoon of water in a small food processor.
2. In a wide and shallow sauté pan, or frying pan, warm the butter on medium. When it's hot, mix in the ginger and garlic for two minutes, and as it starts to take on colour, stir through the tomato puree and the tandoori powder. Add a tablespoon or two of hot water and cook this for a couple of minutes until the pungent aroma of the spice powder goes.
3. Lower the heat to a high simmer and stir in the milky Greek yoghurt. Don't worry if this splits, it will all be okay in the end. When the mixture is stirred through well, add in the paneer cubes. I use a pack of ready cubed paneer for this, but they are often stuck together. So instead of separating the cubes individually, I let the warmth of the pan and a gentle flattening motion with a slotted spoon do the trick, mixing all the ingredients together without breaking the crumbly paneer.
4. Cover and simmer for five minutes. To finish, stir in the garam masala and salt to your taste. You could pour a tablespoon of single cream over the top if you fancy it.

Ingredients:

- ◇ 500gm diced paneer
- ◇ 2 tbsp tandoori masala
- ◇ 2 tbsp tomato puree
- ◇ 4 tbsp milk
- ◇ 6 tbsp Greek-style yoghurt
- ◇ 4 cloves garlic
- ◇ 1 inch ginger
- ◇ 2 tbsp butter
- ◇ 1 tbsp single cream
- ◇ Half tsp garam masala [BUY NOW](#)

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DESSERT: GAJAR KA HALWA

Indian sweets, or mithai, can be an acquired taste. Rich and sugary, they offer the perfect end to a satisfying meal in small doses. Make that very small doses! In my experience, party guests often gorge on the earlier courses, leaving very little space for much else by way of sweet endings. My personal tip is to make something lightweight in small quantities, which can be safely enjoyed for several days after just in case your guests let you down in the final course. Gajar ka Halwa ticks all the boxes. A soft and sweet carrot pudding, it's lovely served warm in little dishes or alongside vanilla ice-cream. A fitting ending to a regal spread!



Ingredients

- ◇ 500gm carrots
- ◇ 4 tbsp ghee [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ 6 tbsp sugar
- ◇ 350ml evaporated milk
- ◇ 6 green cardamoms [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ Cashews [BUY NOW](#)
- ◇ Crushed cardamom and vanilla ice cream to serve

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1. Peel and cut the tops and bottoms off the carrots. Grate by hand or in a food processor.
2. In a pan, bring the ghee to heat on medium. When it's hot, add the grated carrots and sauté for 10 minutes until the carrots take on colour and the moisture they release evaporates. Now add the sugar, the evaporated milk, and cook on a high simmer stirring regularly but gently.
3. In 45-50 minutes the milk will have all evaporated. Crush the cardamoms and stir them in. Serve warm divided into little bowls, with a smattering of crushed cashew nuts and cardamom on top. This is great served with quality vanilla ice cream.

Timings - top tips from Mallika

'My tip would be to cook the Hara Bhara Kebabs a week in advance and pop them in the freezer. The day before your party, make the Cheat's Paneer Makhani and the Gajar Ka Halwa. Cool them both down and stick them in the fridge. On the day of the party, fry and assemble the Aubergine Raita and make the Biryani right before guests are about to arrive, finishing off the oven baking bit as they are tucking into the kebabs. That way you will get the full aromatic punch of the spices and ingredients in the Biryani. Defrost the Kebabs in the fridge during the day, warming them in the microwave just before you serve them. You can also warm the paneer in the same way'.



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