A cool ending: Sorbet topped with caramel-coated bananas.

THE RECIPES

Dinner on the Spice Route

Colin Cowie's vibrant Indian feast: sweet-and-sour mango cocktails, fragrant spinach and herb rice, snappy shrimp curry, and citrus-spiked bananas over snowy coconut sorbet (for story, see page 238).

Bananas in Lime Juice with Coconut Sorbet and Berries

This dessert can be made up to 24 hours in advance, so it's an easy way to end a meal.

¾ cup sugar
½ cup fresh orange juice
½ cup fresh lime juice
Zest of 1 orange, removed with a vegetable peeler and julienned
Zest of 1 lime, removed with a vegetable peeler and julienned
5 firm-ripe bananas, peeled and cut into ¼-inch-thick slices
2 pints coconut sorbet
½ pint blackberries, for garnish
Mint sprigs, for garnish

1. In a heavy-bottom saucepan, bring sugar, orange juice, and lime juice to a boil. Continue to boil 6 to 7 minutes, until sugar has lightly caramelized and syrup is light golden brown in color.
2. Meanwhile, in a small pot of boiling water, blanch orange and lime zests separately, 2 minutes each. Drain and transfer zests to a large bowl. Add bananas and toss gently to combine. Pour syrup over banana mixture. Let cool, cover, and refrigerate at least 3 hours, or up to 24 hours.
3. To serve, place a ½-cup scoop of sorbet into each serving bowl and top with banana mixture. Garnish with blackberries and a sprig of mint. *Makes 6 servings.*

Mango Cocktail

If you can't find mango puree (often sold in aseptic containers) in your local supermarket, try the frozen puree from lepicerie.com.

¾ cup vodka (preferably Grey Goose)
⅓ cup Cointreau
2 cups mango puree
¼ cup lime juice
Fresh mango wedges, for garnish

In a large glass pitcher, combine all ingredients; refrigerate until cold. Serve chilled, in cocktail glasses, garnished with fresh mango wedges. *Makes 6 servings.*

Curried Red Lentil and Swiss Chard Soup

Serve with a dollop of yogurt and a variety of raitas and chutneys (recipes below).

2 Tbsp. olive oil
1 large onion, thinly sliced
5 tsp. curry powder
¼ tsp. ground red (cayenne) pepper
5 cups vegetable broth
1 (1-pound) bunch Swiss chard, tough stalks removed, coarsely chopped
2 cups (about 14 ounces) dried red lentils
1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
1 tsp. salt
6 Tbsp. thick Greek yogurt, thinned with 2 Tbsp. water
1 red or green jalapeño chili, stemmed and thinly sliced
1 lime, cut into 6 wedges

1. Heat oil in large, heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add onion; cook, stirring frequently, until lightly golden, about ›

10 minutes. Stir in curry and red pepper. Add 4 cups broth and chard; increase heat and bring to a boil, stirring until chard is wilted.

2. Stir in lentils and chickpeas. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer 16 to 18 minutes, stirring twice, until lentils are tender.

3. Remove from heat. Puree half the soup (about 4 cups) in a blender or food processor; return puree to pot. Stir in remaining 1 cup broth and salt, and warm over low heat 2 minutes.

4. Divide soup among 6 bowls. Drizzle about 1 Tbsp. thinned yogurt over each serving. Garnish with a few slices of jalapeño and a lime wedge.

Makes 6 servings.

Tomato and Onion Raita

⅓ cup red wine or cider vinegar
2 Tbsp. olive oil
2 Tbsp. water
1 Tbsp. sugar
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
3 large ripe tomatoes (about 2 pounds), stemmed, seeded, and diced
½ medium white onion, finely chopped
2 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro
1 small jalapeño chili, stemmed, seeded, and chopped

In a medium bowl, whisk vinegar, oil, water, sugar, salt, and pepper until blended. Add remaining ingredients and toss until well combined. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours, or up to 24 hours, before serving. Serve chilled.

Makes 3 cups.

Yogurt and Cucumber Raita

Any kind of yogurt will do for this recipe, but for a richer, creamier result, try using the Greek variety.

1 large cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and very thinly sliced (or ½ large seedless hothouse cucumber, thinly sliced)
1 cup plain yogurt
2 Tbsp. chopped cilantro
½ tsp. salt
Ground white pepper, to taste

In a serving bowl, mix all ingredients. Cover and refrigerate up to 24 hours before serving. Serve chilled.

Makes 2 cups.

Mango Chutney

If you're making this chutney, you may as well make a lot of it—leftovers last up to two months in a refrigerated, airtight container. Use them to dress grilled meats or serve atop goat cheese or aside hard, aged cheeses.

6 large, firm-ripe mangoes (about 6 pounds), peeled, pitted, and cut crosswise into thin slices
1 cup cider vinegar
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
10 garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
1 (1-inch) piece fresh ginger, peeled and thinly sliced
1 tsp. ground red (cayenne) pepper
½ tsp. salt

1. Place ingredients in a 4-quart heavy saucepan over medium-high heat and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer 1 hour, uncovered, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking, until chutney thickens.

2. Remove from heat and transfer to a bowl; allow to cool. Store in an airtight jar and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Makes about 5¼ cups.

Samosas in Lettuce Cups with Chili Sauce

Colin prefers the lamb samosas ($10 per dozen), vegetable samosas ($9 per dozen), and chili sauce ($3.50 for 8 ounces) from House of Audré (houseofaudre.com). Or look for a frozen variety in your supermarket. The samosas can be cooked up to 2 hours ahead and served at room temperature.

12 frozen samosas
Vegetable oil, for frying
12 small butter lettuce leaves, washed and dried
Chili sauce, for serving
12 small sprigs cilantro, for garnish

1. Remove samosas from freezer 5 minutes before ready to cook. To cook, fill a large skillet with ¼ inch vegetable oil and place over medium heat. Attach a deep-fry thermometer to side of skillet; heat oil to 350°.

2. Add samosas in a single layer to hot oil. Fry 2 to 3 minutes per side, until golden brown (if samosas start to burn in spots, lower heat). Transfer samosas from oil with a slotted spoon to paper towel; drain.

3. To serve, place each samosa on a lettuce leaf; top with a generous amount of chili sauce and garnish with cilantro.

Makes 6 servings.

Shrimp Curry

Garam masala is a blend of up to 12 different spices that originated in northern India. If you have store-bought masala, you can use it in place of step one. Fresh curry leaves, fenugreek seeds, and black mustard seeds are available at kalustyans.com.

Garam masala:

2 tsp. ground coriander
1 tsp. ground cumin
¼ tsp. ground red (cayenne) pepper
¼ tsp. ground turmeric

Curry:

5 large fresh tomatoes (3 pounds), cored and cut into chunks
3 Tbsp. peeled, chopped fresh ginger
2 Tbsp. tomato paste
3 Tbsp. lemon juice (about 1 lemon)
4 Tbsp. olive oil
1 Tbsp. cumin seeds
2 tsp. fenugreek seeds
2 tsp. black mustard seeds
2 large onions, finely chopped
3 large fresh green chilies (such as poblano, Anaheim, or New Mexico), stemmed, seeded, and diced
10 curry leaves
3 Tbsp. chopped garlic
2 Tbsp. garam masala (*above*)
2½ pounds jumbo shrimp (about 12 shrimp to a pound), shelled and deveined ›

1 tsp. salt
½ cup chopped cilantro
2 limes, sliced into 6 wedges

1. To make masala: Mix spices in a small cup until blended. Set aside.
2. To make curry: Puree tomatoes, ginger, tomato paste, and lemon juice in a blender until smooth. Set aside.
3. Heat 3 Tbsp. oil in a large, deep skillet over medium heat; add cumin, fenugreek seeds, and mustard seeds. Fry 1 to 2 minutes, stirring constantly, until they begin to pop (be careful not to burn them). Add onions, chilies, curry leaves, garlic, and 1 Tbsp. masala; cook 8 minutes, stirring once or twice.
4. Stir in tomato mixture; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer, uncovered, 20 minutes, or until curry resembles a thick gravy.
5. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, toss shrimp with salt and remaining 1 Tbsp. masala until coated. Heat remaining 1 Tbsp. oil in a large nonstick skillet over high heat. When oil is rippling, add 10 shrimp and sear 20 seconds per side, until shrimp firm up and turn pink (they will still be raw in center). Remove to a plate. Sear remaining shrimp in 2 more batches.
6. Stir shrimp into tomato mixture; cook an additional 3 minutes, or until shrimp are fully cooked through (cut one with a knife to check doneness). Transfer curry to a serving bowl and sprinkle with cilantro. Serve with lime wedges.
Makes 6 servings.

Masala-Spiced Chickpeas

If you have store-bought masala, you can use it in place of step one.

Garam masala:
2 tsp. ground coriander
1 tsp. ground cumin
¼ tsp. ground red (cayenne) pepper
¼ tsp. ground turmeric

Chickpeas:
¼ cup vegetable oil
2 cups finely chopped onion
2 (15-ounce) cans chickpeas, rinsed and drained
1 tsp. coarsely ground black pepper
¾ tsp. salt
1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro, for garnish

1. To make masala: Mix spices in a small cup until blended. Set aside.
2. To make chickpeas: Heat oil in a nonstick frying pan over medium-high heat. Add onions and sauté until light brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Add masala; stir 1 minute, or until spices become fragrant.
3. Stir in chickpeas, pepper, salt, and 1 Tbsp. water. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, 7 minutes, or until the first few chickpeas begin to split. If mixture becomes dry, add additional water, 1 Tbsp. at a time; curry should be moist but not saucy.
4. Remove from heat, and stir in lemon juice. Garnish with chopped cilantro.
Makes 6 servings.

Green Rice

2 cups trimmed, loosely packed spinach, rinsed and dried, or 5 ounces (½ package) frozen cut-leaf spinach, thawed
½ bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley (about 1 cup), stemmed, washed, and dried
½ bunch fresh cilantro (about 1 cup), stemmed, washed, and dried
1½ tsp. salt
2 Tbsp. olive oil
2 cups basmati rice
¼ cup toasted pine nuts, for garnish

1. In a blender, puree spinach, parsley, cilantro, salt, and ¾ cup water until smooth.
2. Heat oil in a heavy saucepan over medium heat; add rice and cook 2 minutes, stirring constantly, until coated and lightly toasted (rice will smell fragrant).
3. Stir in spinach mixture and 2½ cups water and bring to a boil; reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer 16 to 18 minutes, or until most of liquid has been absorbed, stirring once or twice.
4. Remove from heat. Let rest 5 minutes. Fluff with a fork and serve topped with toasted pine nuts.

Poppy Seed–Crusted Cauliflower

White poppy seeds and nigella seeds (also known as kalonji or black onion seeds) are available at kalustyans.com.

5 Tbsp. black or white poppy seeds
6 or 7 small dried hot red chilies, like Japone or Thai (3 stemmed, seeded, broken into pieces, and 3 or 4 whole chilies)
½ tsp. ground turmeric
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. sugar
1 medium-size cauliflower (about 2 pounds), cut into ½-inch florets
3 Tbsp. vegetable oil
½ tsp. nigella seeds
2 bay leaves

1. Grind poppy seeds and chili pieces in a spice or coffee grinder until they form a fine powder; transfer to a small bowl and mix with 6 Tbsp. water to form a paste. Set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, combine turmeric, ½ tsp. salt, and ½ tsp. sugar; add cauliflower and toss until evenly coated. Set aside.
3. In a large nonstick skillet, heat 2 Tbsp. oil over medium-high heat. When oil is hot, add cauliflower and stir-fry 4 to 6 minutes, until it begins to brown in spots; remove with slotted spoon to baking sheet lined with paper towels.
4. Add remaining 1 Tbsp. oil to skillet over medium heat. When oil is hot, add nigella seeds, bay leaves, and remaining whole chilies. Stir-fry 15 seconds, then add poppy seed paste. Stir-fry 1 to 2 minutes, until fragrant; stir in cauliflower and remaining ½ tsp. each salt and sugar until cauliflower is coated.
5. Add ⅔ cup water; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat to low, and simmer 6 minutes, stirring once or twice, until cauliflower is just tender and sauce is absorbed.
Makes 6 servings.