

Vegetable jalfrezi

Vegetable jalfrezi is said to have originated in India during the time of the British Raj. Once a creative way to use up leftovers, it has since evolved into a flavourful and texture-rich dish — a popular Indian restaurant menu item. Try this recipe with a mixture of vegies, or highlight just one or two. Either way, vegetable jalfrezi will add a colourful splash to your plate.

REGION India | SERVES 4–5 | PREPARATION 15 minutes

COOKING 35 minutes | DIFFICULTY Easy

1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
375 g (13 oz/3 cups) cauliflower florets
1 carrot, chopped
2 tablespoons coriander seeds
1 tablespoon rice bran oil
½ onion, chopped
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
2 teaspoons crushed garlic
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) tomato sauce
½ red capsicum (pepper), chopped into bite-sized pieces
75 g (2½ oz/½ cup) frozen green peas, thawed
1 teaspoon Garam masala
chilli powder, to taste (optional)
1 small tomato, seeded and chopped
lemon or lime juice, to taste

Bring a saucepan of water to the boil, and have a bowl of iced water at the ready.

Add the salt and ground turmeric to the pan of boiling water. Add the cauliflower and carrot and boil for 3 minutes. Strain the vegetables, then immediately drop them into the iced water to stop the cooking process. Drain for 1–2 minutes, then set aside.

In a non-stick frying pan, dry-roast the coriander seeds over low heat for about 5 minutes, until they start to dance in the pan, being sure to stir them often so they don't burn. Tip onto a small plate, leave to cool, then grind using a mortar and pestle. Set aside.

Heat the rice bran oil in the same pan. Add the onion and cook, stirring, for 2–3 minutes, or until lightly golden. Add the ginger and garlic and fry for 1 minute. Stir in the tomato sauce and cook for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking, until the oil separates from the sauce.

Stir in the capsicum and peas and cook for 2–3 minutes. Now add the blanched cauliflower and carrots, along with the reserved ground coriander, the garam masala and chilli powder, if using. Mix well, and season to taste with salt.

Cook for about 5 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender, but still retain their crunch, sprinkling a little water over them occasionally so that the spices don't burn.

Stir in the chopped tomato and cook for a final 1–2 minutes. Stir in a splash of lemon or lime juice, to taste. Serve hot, with rice, roti, chapatti or naan.

Garam masala

Literally meaning 'warm spice', garam masala is an Indian staple. The exact blend of spices varies between households and regions, though it typically includes cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, cumin, coriander, nutmeg and black peppercorns. It adds warmth and depth of flavour, rather than heat.

MAKES 100 g (3½ oz)

2 cinnamon sticks (not cassia!)
10 green cardamom pods
8 black cardamom pods
15 cloves
1 tablespoon cumin seeds
1 tablespoon coriander seeds
1 tablespoon black peppercorns
½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
2 dried red Kashmiri chillies

Place a dry heavy-based frying pan over medium–high heat until fully heated and slightly smoking. Add all the ingredients and shake and stir for about a minute, or until the spices smell toasted, are slightly darker, and give off just a slight bit of smoke. Tip into a bowl and leave to cool.

Grind to a fine powder, using a spice grinder or mortar and pestle, and store in an airtight container.

***Lands of the Curry Leaf* by Peter Kuruvita (Murdoch Books, £25). Photography by Alan Benson. Food styling by Vanessa Austin.**