

Route 79 : Mirch Masala (Pepper Sabji)

The effects of feeling hungry on the way home

March 23 2004

Mirch Masala

"Mirch" is a Punjabi term (and Hindi I think) for pepper - or capsicum. More accurately it refers to entire family of capsaicin-carrying vegetables - which includes green chillies, red chillies, peppers etc. (Capsaicin is the chemical that causes the "heat" sensation in chillies.) Of course, the green peppers (capsicums) that you get at your local grocer or supermarket are not at all "hot" - but impart a very unique taste and aroma that when cooked (with some potato) will result in a fantastic tasting dish. The cooking style is "masala" - and is one of my absolutely favourite mid-week vegetarian dishes.

I cooked this last night whilst dancing away in the kitchen to Toni Braxton's "Unbreak my heart" track - the "club mix" - a perfect song to cook (and sing) along to whilst cooking this green pepper sabzi!

- * 6 medium/large green peppers
- * 1 or 2 onions - very coarsely chopped
- * 3 or 4 small/medium-sized potatoes
- * 2 teaspoons salt
- * 2 teaspoon haldi (turmeric)
- * 2 teaspoons garam masala
- * 2 teaspoons ground coriander
- * Chunks of garlic, ginger and chillie
- * Pinch of cumin seed and pinch of onion seed
- * A few generous dashes of lemon juice



Ingredients

You might be put off slightly by the number of peppers used in this recipe - but don't be - because the volume might look overwhelming when you end up with a mountain of chopped pepper - but trust me - the volume will reduce to less than half of what you start with! Because of the starting volume - you might want to get your biggest pot or karahi ready too.

The more observant of you will notice that there is a picture of tinned tomato above - but I haven't listed it in the

ingredients. This is because I mistakenly got the tomato tin prepared when I was getting the ingredients together. This recipe does *not* require tomato!

OK - here goes!

Pour a couple of tablespoons of vegetable oil (we use sunflower oil because it's zero cholesterol) into the karahi - and light up a fierce flame. You want the oil very hot. Throw in the pinches of cumin seed and onion seed - and wait until they start to splutter in the hot oil before you throw in the coarsely chopped onion. When I say coarsely - I mean really coarse - e.g. take a peeled onion, chop it in half, chop each half in half again - and then chop the quarters into half again - with this final chop in the opposite direction the previous one. I hope you get what I mean by that.

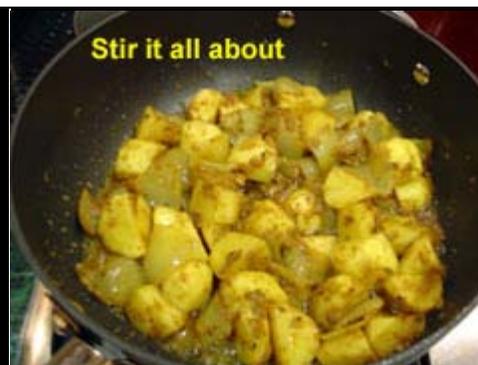


Fry the onions for a few minutes (stirring infrequently) until they are becoming translucent. Then lower the flame a bit to medium and throw in the pulped garlic, ginger and chillie. (Remember that if you are using chunks from your freezer you must defrost the chunks first by zapping them in the microwave for about 20 seconds on full power.) Stir fry the mixture for a couple of minutes - and then add all the ground spices as per the quantities listed above - but be happy to add more or less depending upon your taste. You can use red chillie powder instead of pulped frozen chillie. But whatever you do - do NOT use powdered chillie or garlic as substitutes for the real thing!



Stir up the spices for a minute - and then add the potato chunks. The chunks should be bite-sized - and about the same sort of size/square as the green pepper chunks. For this dish I always use "new" potatoes - as they will cook quicker - and have a great texture. You could always use the small new potatoes of you like - and leave them with skin on - either whole or chopped into halves.

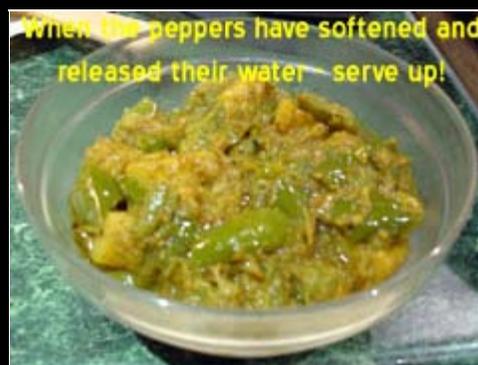
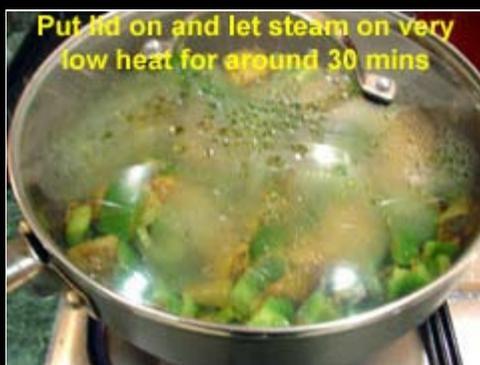
Stir up all the potato chunks so that they are coated thoroughly with all the spice/onion mixture. And turn up the flame temporarily so that the karahi gets real hot and starts to make a sizzling noise. And now for the magical bit: pour in 5 or 6 shakes of the concentrated lemon juice into the pot - which will make it sizzle even louder! The lemon juice provides a little extra liquid with which to steam the potatoes in.



After adding the dashes of lemon juice - stir it all up - reduce the flame to low - and stick the lid on the pot - with no vents. The objective is to steam the potatoes gently until they are soft. But be careful not to overcook the potatoes so that they are mashing or breaking up. The new potatoes I used only took 15 minutes to soften to the point that they are almost ready to eat. It's at this point that you add all of the green pepper chunks - increase the flame again - and stir it about - until the peppers are also coated in the spices. Leave the flame high as you put the lid back on - and let the peppers heat up until the pot is making the loudest noise that it can before you reduce the flame to very low.



Keep it on the very lowest flame you possibly can for a further 30 to 30 minutes. Stir after 10 or fifteen minutes. You will notice that the peppers have reduced in volume dramatically - and the pot has a lot more liquid in it. What you should do is cook for the final 10 minutes with the lid off so that some of the water evaporates - and what you are left with is a semi-dry consistency (see large picture below) - i.e. nothing should be "swimming" in water. At this point you are ready to serve!



This dish is best served with fresh roti (chappati) - but warmed and lightly buttered wholemeal pitta bread is an excellent & convenient substitute. Garnish with freshly chopped coriander if you have some at hand. A side salad accompaniment goes nicely with it too. If you have any leftover - just do the usual: stick it into foodsaving container - with clingfilm of airtight lid - and stick in the fridge. Will keep for a couple of days - and can be reheated very easily in the microwave.



Have you tried this? Even if you haven't - let me know what you think!
You can leave a comment on this recipe by [clicking here](#).