



With Rashmita Solanki. Contact her at rashmita@amg.biz

Courgettes

COURGETTES are available all year round and can be cooked in different ways and combined with a vast array of other ingredients.

Courgettes are related to watermelons, gherkins and cucumbers – they all belong to the cucurbit family. They have a delicate, fresh flavour and are a tender vegetable, usually eaten when they are young or even in the flower form as fritters.

They are low in calories and have a high water content, with a good amount of folate, potassium and vitamins A and C.

These recipes are taken from *500 Italian Dishes* by Valentina Sforza. Published by Apple Press. ISBN: 9781 8454 33680.

Grilled vegetables:

Ingredients:

- 3 courgettes, sliced lengthways
- 4 red peppers, deseeded and sliced lengthways
- 1 large aubergine, sliced lengthways
- 1 large red onion, sliced across centre into 8 flat, thick slices
- 4 large tomatoes, sliced thickly
- 2 bulbs fennel, sliced thickly
- 6 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh-leaf parsley
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Method:

■ Heat the grill to medium. Grill each vegetable separately, brushed with olive oil, until tender. Arrange on a platter and sprinkle with chopped parsley, drizzle with olive oil and season. Serve at room temperature.

Courgette cake

Ingredients:

- 12 medium-sized courgettes, topped and tailed
- 2 small onions
- 6 tbsp unsalted butter
- 5 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 tsp fresh marjoram leaves
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 5 tbsp single cream, sour cream or whole milk
- 6 eggs, beaten
- 8 tbsp freshly grated Parmesan
- 6 tbsp Italian dry breadcrumbs

Method:

■ Preheat oven to 190C (375 F/Gas mark 5). Slice the courgettes into rounds or cubes and place in a colander to drain for half an hour. Rinse and dry.

■ Slice the onions finely and fry gently without browning in butter and half the oil. Use half the remaining oil to grease a ring mould or ovenproof dish. Add the sliced courgettes to the onions and continue to cook gently, stirring frequently.

■ When courgettes are soft and onions are cooked, set aside to cool, then add the parsley marjoram, salt and pepper.

■ In a separate bowl, beat the cream, sour cream or milk with eggs and Parmesan, then add seasoning to taste.

■ When the courgettes are cool, stir into the egg mixture. Sprinkle oiled mould or dish thoroughly with half the breadcrumbs, making sure they stick to the sides and bottom thickly. Pour courgette and egg mixture into the dish and tap it lightly to allow it to settle. Sprinkle with remaining breadcrumbs and drizzle with remaining oil.

■ Bake for about 30 minutes, until firm. Remove from the oven and cool before turning onto a serving dish. Can be eaten hot or cold.



Spicing up the art

RECIPES, TIPS AND TASTES FROM TOP FRENCH-INDIAN

by PRIYA MULJI

RECENTLY released Hollywood film *The Hundred-Foot Journey* is a France-set story about an Indian restaurant opening across the road from a posh French bistro.

The film is filled with different flavours, features plenty of exotic dishes and gives a window into the world of great cuisine. Not surprisingly the Steven Spielberg and Oprah Winfrey-produced film has sparked an interest in Indo-French cuisine.

With that in mind, *Eastern Eye* sent columnist Priya Mulji to learn about the finer points of cooking, good food and entertaining at top restaurant La Porte Des Indes in the heart of London.

"I was excited to develop my cooking skills and learn about food inspired by former French colonies of India. Within Indian cuisine, I basically tend to cook paneer, chicken, salmon and assorted vegetables," said Priya.

"My interest in cooking has increased since I started living alone so I thought this would be the perfect opportunity to learn something new. I could impress my mother (who isn't always enamoured with my cooking skills) and perhaps a man too, because they say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

Welcome

I was greeted at the restaurant – run by Mehernosh and Sherin Mody – with a refreshing pomegranate, coconut and passion fruit drink with a pretty flower in it.

Top tip: Create a welcoming atmosphere and make some exotic drinks before the main meal for guests to have, along with interesting talking points.

The kitchen

I was given a tour of the La Porte Des Indes kitchens where we were shown how fresh naans are made in an authentic and very hot tandoor oven. They showed us how meats are marinated before being cooked and how certain foods are cooked before being left to marinate so they capture the flavour. We were then shown to the area where the cookery demonstration was going to be taking place and all the spices, vegetables and fish were laid out like a feast, so we definitely knew we were going to be in for a treat.

Top tip: Know how to properly use what you have in the kitchen. Learn about the food, equipment and spices you will be using during cooking, and make sure they are easily accessible. Laying them out in an orderly fashion before cooking reduces stress and enables you to concentrate on culinary creativity.

The dishes

Chef Mehernosh Mody taught us how to cook some tasty dishes. The first was crunchy chard and waterchestnut beignets, a pakora-like delicacy that uses non-traditional ingredients which is twice fried to give the ultimate dish a crunchy, delicate texture.

We were then taught how to cook rougail d'aubergine, a *baingan ka bharta* type of dish



served with naan bread; and to finish, cassoulet de fruits de mer, a rich seafood stew in a seasoned, spiced coconut sauce. The aubergine was served with a red Cabernet Sauvignon wine and the fish with a white Sauvignon Blanc. Each dish wasn't overly spicy but tasty, delicate and melted in your mouth.

Top tips:

- Sunflower or vegetable oil are the best oils to use because they don't have a strong flavour.
- The trick to a good curry is to slow cook it. You can't hurry a curry.

- Market-bought chaat masala is great, so don't spend too much time trying to make it.
- In the case of Indian spices, buy the best you can afford because price does dictate the quality.
- It is always best to use a pestle and mortar to grind spices as a machine can over-grind them.
- Leave dough for naans to rise for a few hours.
- When a recipe tells you to cook ingredients in a certain way, don't stray from that. There is a reason some recipes say to sweat onions and some to brown them. They all add to the ultimate taste of the dish.

Rougail d'aubergine

Ingredients:

- 4 medium-sized aubergines/eggplants, about 500g
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- ½ tsp mustard seeds
- 2 Spanish onions, chopped
- 4cm/1 ½" finger of ginger, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 fresh red chillies, finely chopped
- 2 fresh green chillies, finely chopped
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- 4 tbsp coconut milk
- 2 tsp lemon juice
- Salt to taste
- Fresh coriander, chopped and fresh red chillies in strips to garnish



Method:

■ Prick the aubergines/eggplants on each side with the tines of a fork. Wipe with a little oil. Grill or bake in an oven heated to 200C/400F for 20 minutes. Remove from the heat and when they are cool enough to

handle cut in half lengthways, scoop out the flesh and blend or process it into a puree.

■ Heat the oil in a saucepan, put in the mustard seeds. When they splutter, add the chopped onions and fry until they are translucent. Then add the ginger, red and green chillies and saute for two minutes.

■ Lower the heat and add the turmeric followed by the pureed aubergine/eggplant. Cook, stirring over a low heat for 10 minutes.

■ Then add the coconut milk and stir for a further two minutes. Add the lemon juice and salt to taste.

■ Serve hot, garnished with the fresh coriander and red chillies.

Crunchy chard and water chestnut beignets (Serves 8)

Ingredients:

- 150g Swiss chard
- 150g Red chard
- 75g gram flour
- 20g cornflour
- 100g water chestnuts fresh or tinned
- ¼ tsp turmeric powder
- ½ tsp cumin powder
- ½ tsp caraway seeds
- 1/2tsp red chilli powder
- ½ tsp salt
- Vegetable oil to deep fry
- 2 tsp chaat masala powder