Mouth Watering Dishes Sri Lankan Style!

Posted on

The master of scintillating meals, Koluu presents two recipes; one for kaha bath (yellow rice), and the other for fish mustard curry.

Words Chiranthi Rajapakse Photographs Menaka Aravinda

Kaha bath

Kaha bath is one of the staple dishes for festive occasions. Without a dish of fragrant, delicately coloured rice garnished with cadju nuts, no party would be complete. Koluu explains the secret of the perfect dish of yellow rice, “It’s very important that all the ingredients given in the recipe be used. Especially the chicken stock and the coconut milk are essential since this gives the rice its richness. After adding the stock and the crushed black pepper it’s important to use a lot of nice thick coconut milk.”

The distinctive yellow colour of kaha bath is imparted by the use of turmeric, which

is commonly used as a spice and dye in South Asian and Middle Eastern cuisine. Its active ingredient is curcumin. In medieval Europe, turmeric became known as Indian saffron, since it was often used as an alternative to saffron, which was more expensive.

Sri Lankan meals are often elaborate affairs with a rice dish being accompanied by a multitude of curries. A guest who doesn't try each and every dish runs the risk of offending his host. Koluu though, has a different outlook. He comments, "To present Sri Lankan food is very difficult, because of the fact that we have so many accompaniments. The beauty of each dish is never shown because of that." He recommends that the yellow rice be eaten plain "The rice itself is such a flavourful rice that it could be eaten on its own." Kaha bath can be garnished with fried cadju nuts, sultanas or straw potatoes.

Recipe

1 kg Basmati rice

3 tablespoons of vegetable oil

3 tablespoons of butter

A sprig of curry leaves

¼ inch piece of pandang leaf

8 cardamoms

8 cloves

1 inch stick of cinnamon

3 onions chopped

6 cloves garlic chopped

1 litre chicken stock

¼ litre of coconut milk

2 teaspoons of turmeric

Salt

Crushed pepper

Method

Place pan on fire, heat, then add the oil and butter. Add the curry leaves, pandang leaf, cardamoms, cloves, cinnamon, onions and garlic and cook till it starts browning. Add the rice, sauté well, and add the stock, turmeric and the crushed pepper, cook till the water has absorbed to the level of the rice, then add the coconut milk. Cover with a lid, lessen the fire and cook for a further 6 minutes and take off fire.

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Fish Mustard Curry

Fish mustard curry; a mildly flavoured dish that brings out the flavour of fish. Seer fish has been used for this recipe. "Any proper white fish can be used. Red fish doesn't taste good in a mustard curry and should not be used," says Koluu.

Mustard ground in vinegar is one of the key ingredients of this dish. One of the oldest and the most widely used spices, mustard was used by the Chinese thousands of years ago and its use was well known to the ancient Greeks as well. Mustard is used to add a spicy tone to many dishes. For those who live out of Sri Lanka and are unable to get freshly ground mustard, Koluu recommends the use of mustard grains.

Koluu advises simplicity in the serving, and recommends a few simple dishes to accompany the fish mustard curry. "My recommendation is steamed rice, a nice fresh gotukola sambol and maybe a few fried chillies. That would really set it off nicely. Keep it simple" he says.

Recipe

500g Seer fish or any

firm white fish

A sprig of curry leaves

2 green chillies chopped

60 grams onions chopped

3 cloves garlic chopped

4 teaspoons of mustard

ground in vinegar

¼ teaspoon turmeric

3 cloves

3 cardamoms

2 inch piece of cinnamon

1 ½ cups of coconut milk

Juice of 1 lime

Salt

Freshly ground pepper

Method

Place all ingredients in a pan except for the sliced fish, mustard and lime juice. Gradually bring the gravy to the boil, then add in the mustard and stir well. Add the slices of fish, cook for a further 5 minutes. Take off fire and add the lime juice.

Koluu is lyrical in his praise of Sri Lankan cuisine. “Sri Lanka has incredible food. The beauty of it is that no two people cook the same way,” he points out. “Each one cooks slightly differently. Some people may use an extra bit of cumin or extra curry powder, while others may use their own blend of curry powder. In the North and South of the country for example, there are different styles of cooking. That’s the beauty of it.” A beauty that perhaps more people will now be able to appreciate by experimenting with these recipes.

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