Unduwal 101

Posted on



Crispy and fragrant, these homemade unduwal are absolutely delicious

April has gone, leaving behind it a trail of honeyed memories, though few as sweet as the *unduwal* made by Somawathie Nanda – our neighbourhood's gourmet home chef.

Words Daleena Samara | **Photographs** Rasika Surasena

Nanda's spread of tasty sweetmeats for Sinhala New Year is hard to beat, from her perfect *konda kavum*, or oil cakes, to her batter-coated *kokis*, rice cookies, plunged deep into smoking oil for that melt-in-the-mouth magic. Then there's her *unduwal*, also known as *undu walalu*, bangles of *undu* flour mixture deep fried and dripping with honey. They're exceptionally delicious.

Although *unduwal* can be purchased in sweet shops even out of season, not all *unduwal* are created equal: if the batter is too thick, the rings can be heavy and

unappetizing; if too soft, the bangle is crumbly. It takes skill and practice to get it exactly right: which is why we asked Nanda to do us a demo.

Get ready for a 101 in unduwal aka pani walalu (bangles of honey).

Ingredients

Batter:
250 g black gram flour (see method below)
125 g rice flour
100 g brown sugar
2 tsps turmeric
The flesh of one coconut, grated, with a little water, squeezed and drained (making about 250 ml)
Pinch of salt

Coconut oil for deep frying A large square of clean white muslin with a hole of about 5 mm diameter in the centre

Syrup:
750 ml *kithul* treacle
1-2 cardamom pods
One small stick cinnamon



List of ingredients from far left: clean black lentils, rice flour, sugar, coconut milk, kithul palm treacle, turmeric, cinnamon and cardamom

Stage 1

Wash and soak the black lentils overnight. You can buy cleaned urad dhal at any grocery store. Soak overnight – the longer they are soaked, the easier they are to grind. Although she has an electric grinder, Somawathie prefers to grind the seeds by hand on her old grinding stone, or *mirisgala*. She sets aside some of the thick coconut milk that she uses to moisten the lentils on the stone as she crushes them into a paste.

Put the lentil paste in a bowl, season with a little salt and add the sugar and turmeric. Mix in the coconut milk a little at a time, making sure the batter is not too thick or thin and that there are no lumps in it. Leave it to ferment for about 12 hours. This is a very important step which makes the *unduwal* not only firm but tasty.

Stage 2

Crush the spices. Heat the treacle and make sure that it is the right consistency; it must not be too thick or thin. You can also prepare the syrup with brown sugar, which Nanda says is easier to work with than honey. Use about 500 g sugar to one cup water, stirring over the heat until it dissolves and thickens. Of course, *kithul* palm or coconut treacle is more nutritious than sugar and has its own delicious flavour.

Add the spices to the syrup and stir, keeping a watchful eye on the liquid: every second makes a difference to not only the colour but the taste; take your eye off it and it could burn. Keep swirling the syrup to even out the colour. Because the *urad* has its own distinct flavour and aroma, don’t overdo the spices – they should complement the *urad* rather than overpower it. When the liquid is slightly thick and syrupy, take it off the heat and set aside.

Prepare to fry the *urad* bangles by heating the oil in a deep frying pan and spreading the muslin on a plate or flat surface. By now the mixture should have settled into a thick, smooth batter. Place a spoonful of batter in the centre of the muslin, bundling up the cloth around it to make a piping bag. Squeeze the batter out of the hole directly into the hot oil, making little swirls with the outer ring six to

eight centimetres in diameter. The circles don’t need to be perfect, but size matters: too large and the bangle will not absorb the syrup, too small and it will get soggy. Take care not to burn yourself.

You have to work swiftly, making as many bangles as your pan can hold. Fry them quickly, turning them so they’re evenly golden brown. When done, take them out of the oil and put straight into the warm honey syrup. The fried bangles absorb warm syrup better and warming the syrup also prevents crystals from forming. Let them soak for three to four minutes, then remove and drain the excess syrup.

Leave to cool, and they’re ready to eat! The *urad* soaked in lightly spiced honey syrup is heavenly, and the coconut milk, honey and spices create a delicate medley of flavours.

Some cooks mix one part of *urad* to one part of rice flour, while others may also add wheat flour. Adding wheat flour, however, can make the bangles heavy. The combination of just *urad* and rice flour makes *unduwal* somewhat delicate and yet firm and crispy. You can save time by grinding the lentils in a blender or food processor.

Why wait for next April – have a honey bangle in advance, and savour it while it’s crisp and new – like we did as soon as they cooled! *Unduwal* keep for a week stored in an airtight container. Be warned: they are extremely sweet. But a little indulgence now and then makes life more delightful.

Recipe courtesy of P D Somawathie of Galapitamada, Kegalle.





