

Fragrant Lamb Curry with Coconut

Serves 4-6

1/4 cup vegetable oil
3 bay leaves
2 tsp whole cloves
8 cardamom pods, bruised
1 tsp fennel seeds
3 cinnamon quills, bruised
3 large white onions, halved and finely sliced
1 tsp salt
2 tsp fresh ginger paste
2 tsp fresh garlic paste
1 tsp ground turmeric
3 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp chilli powder
2 tsp ground cumin
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp fresh grated nutmeg
1/4 tsp chilli powder (or cayenne pepper)
3 long red chillies, pureed with a little water
3 large, juicy red tomatoes – 2 finely diced, 1 pureed with a little water and a teaspoon of brown sugar
1 kg cubed lamb leg or shoulder
1/2 cup shredded coconut soaked in 1 cup hot water
3 tbspn ground almond meal
Handful of fresh curry leaves
Bunch fresh coriander – chopped, and reserve some picked leaves for serving

To start: Pre-heat your oven to 180°C (160°C fan forced) / 350-375°F. You will need to use a medium to large pot/pan with lid than can go from your stove top to the oven.

Method: Heat enough oil to cover the base of the pan until almost smoking. Add bay leaves, cloves, cardamom pods, fennel seeds and cinnamon quills. Fry for a minute or two – until the spices crackle and pop and release their aroma.

Add the onions and the salt to help caramelise the onions. Fry until they are a rich golden colour and sweet, turning as you go.

Add the ginger and garlic pastes to the pan, then the powdered spices. Stir in the chilli puree and a little water to stop the spices from burning. Add diced tomato, tomato puree and a good pinch of salt and stir well to combine.

Turn the heat to high and add the meat. Sear the meat, turning as you go to ensure all pieces are coated and sealed. Add the soaked coconut and its water, and the almond meal.

Cover with a lid and cook in the oven for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Check the curry at 30 minute intervals – stirring and checking to see that the meat is becoming tender, and the curry is not sticking to the base of the pan.

Note: at these intervals, check for seasoning and heat – if you want more kick, you can add some more fresh or powdered chilli. Add more water if you think it needs it, but this curry should have a thick gravy like sauce so don't overdo it.

When the curry is ready – stir in the curry leaves and some chopped coriander.

Garnish with extra picked coriander leaves, and serve with a tomato and onion salad, steamed rice and some sour yoghurt.