

Cooking with Curry Leaf

Add a unique and aromatic taste to your dishes

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPH BY ALISON GOTTS



The curry tree (*Murraya koenigii*) is a small tree, native to India, which has been spread by Indians who have migrated around the world. Small cream flowers come in bunches, followed by small seeds, which are easily propagated. The tree may also be established from root suckers which are plentiful around a tree. The tree has a wonderful aroma when you shake the leaves, and crushing the leaf releases the aroma.

Gene Katzer describes the fragrance as ‘not like curry leaves at all. It reminds me more of sage. It can go together with other Mediterranean herbs, into Italian or French food.’

Curry trees like full sun, very well drained soil which should be on the dry side and they need fertilizer during summer months. For those of you living in colder climates, curry trees can be grown in tubs, and brought inside over winter. It is worth growing one of these trees in your garden or your patio, as there is nothing like picking fresh curry leaves in just the right amount when you need them. Since they lose their delicate fragrance when dried, you should really try to obtain them fresh.



Penny Woodward in ‘*Asian Herbs and Vegetables*’ says they provide a delicious roasted curry flavour when cooked, and combine particularly well with vegetables, where they can be fried first until turning brown, and then other ingredients added. In India they are fried in combination with other spices and used in a wide range of curries giving a delicious flavour and aroma.

Try frying the leaves with brown mustard seeds, and crushed dried chilli, before adding it to lentil dishes at the last minute. Chop the leaves finely and add to basmati rice or yoghurt to accompany curries. Charmaine Solomon in the ‘*The Complete Asian Cookbook*’ has several recipes from Sri Lanka in which the curry leaves are ground before being added to the dish during cooking. Here is one of her recipes:

VATAKKA CURRY – Sri Lanka
Yellow Pumpkin Curry - Serves 6

500 gms pumpkin
1 small onion finely chopped
2 cloves garlic finely chopped
3 fresh green chillies, seeded and chopped
8 – 10 curry leaves
½ teaspoon fenugreek seeds
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
2 teaspoons pounded Maldive fish or dried prawns
1 1/2 cups thin coconut milk
1 teaspoon salt
½ cup thick coconut milk
1 teaspoon black mustard seeds

Peel pumpkin and cut into large chunks. Put into a pan with all the ingredients except the thick coconut milk and mustard seeds. Bring slowly to simmering point and cook gently, uncovered, until pumpkin is almost tender. Meanwhile, grind the mustard seeds in mortar and pestle and mix with the thick coconut milk. Add to the simmering pot and cook for 5 minutes longer on very gentle heat.

(From 'The Complete Asian Cookbook' by Charmaine Solomon, p. 143)

For further information on the curry tree visit

'Curry Leaf Heaven' at <http://kurma.net/essays/e8.html>

'Gene Katzer's Spice Pages' at http://www.uni-graz.at/~katzer/engl/Murr_koe.html