

Try an Indian samosa with a unusual autumn flair

I love Indian food, but until recently, knew little about preparing it. Some of the best local chefs around shared their knowledge with me while I researched this week's Taste cover story.



In the kitchen with Lana Mini

My favorite local Indian restaurants are the Small World Cafe, 111 E Kirby in Detroit, in the basement of the International Institute near the Detroit Institute of Arts. Small World serves great curries and Indian breads. At Shant-E-Punjab, 31408 Ford Road in Garden City, the lunch buffet is perfect for first-timers who want to sample northern Indian

cooking. Try the Malai Kofta — little spicy vegetable balls. Mustard seeds, green chili seeds, saffron, cardamom, fennel and cinnamon awaken my senses and comfort me when I have a cold.

Here are some of my favorite dishes — they're available at most northern Indian restaurants: Vegetable samosas, Kachumber salad, Mutter Paneer or Aloo Gobi, a side of rice, Naan, and water, lots of it, please.

Samosa is a flaky turnover stuffed with spicy potatoes and peas and topped with a browned sweet chutney. Kachumber salad is finely chopped lettuce, cucumber and carrots topped with a very spicy dressing. Mutter Paneer is fried cheese and peas simmered in a rich intensely spicy/kind of sweet sauce. Naan is fluffy Indian flat bread made in an open oven.

After interviewing Indian chefs for my story, I decided

to try my hand at Indian cooking, and choose a recipe from the book "Yamuna's Table, Healthful Cuisine Inspired by the Flavors of India" written by Yamuna Devi (623, Dutton Books). Yamuna's Table is not traditional Indian cuisine — it's healthy food with an Indian flair.

The book has a useful glossary and 200 interesting recipes like Eggplant, Potato and Chickpea Stew; Mung Bean and Basmati Rice stew with vegetables; Gingered Tomato Sauce; Cilantro Chutney and Blackberry-Filled Baked Apples with Saffron Pastry Cream.

In celebration of autumn I chose to make an appetizer: Winter squash Samosas stuffed with pecans and coconut. Here they were baked rather than traditionally fried. Typically samosas are stuffed with potatoes and peas and I missed that flavor, but the samosas were still wonderfully flaky and spicy.

What's good about this recipe is the samosas freeze nicely.

VEGETABLE SQUASH SAMOSAS

- Makes about 24
- Pastry
- 1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 to 2 jalapeno chilies, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon sugar
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) chilled butter, cut into 1/2-inch dice
- 4 ounces chilled light cream cheese, cut into 1/2-inch dice
- Filling
- two 14 ounce packages frozen squash puree (winter type) or 2 1/2 cups cooked winter squash puree
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper
- 1 1/2 jalapeno chilies, seeded, minced (preferably with a Japanese ginger grater)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

- 1/3 cup freshly grated coconut or grated frozen coconut, dehydrated
- 3 tablespoons chopped pecans

To prepare the pastry, combine all of the pastry ingredients in a food processor work bowl fitted with a metal blade and process until the dough forms a ball (usually less than a minute.)

Shape into three smooth patties, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate. (Can be made one to two days ahead of use.)

To prepare the filling, defrost the frozen squash in a strainer to allow the excess liquid to drain off.

Place the defrosted or fresh squash puree and one teaspoon of butter in a large non-stick frying pan over moderate heat.

sonings, coconut and nuts; cool. Cover and refrigerate for up to two days.

To assemble the samosas, preheat the oven to 375°F. On lightly floured surface, roll out one portion of the pastry into an oblong approximately 9/16 inches in length.

Using a fluted or plain 3 1/2-inch cutter, cut out eight rounds from the dough.

Gather the scraps and set aside. Place one tablespoon of filling on each round; dampen the edges and fold the dough over the filling. Press the edges firmly with your fingertips to seal.

Place the samosas on ungreased baking sheets. Repeat the process with the other two portions of dough to assemble 24 pastries.

Roll scraps to make 3 or 4 additional samosas. Bake until puffed and browned, about 20 minutes. Alternately, bake 15 minutes, cool, wrap and freeze for up to one month.

INDIAN MARKETS

- Foods of India - 1168 Broadway, Ann Arbor, (734) 332-0500
- Bombay Grocers - 2202 Packard, Ann Arbor, (734) 971-7707
- Krishna Grocers - 45164 Ford Road, Canton, (734) 254-0357
- India Grocers - 45480 Ford Road, Canton, (734) 459-2016
- India Grocers - 28251 Ford Road, Garden City, (734) 458-2007
- Patel Brothers - 28684 Ford Road, Garden City, (734) 427-4445
- Nayna Grocers - 24345 Halsted Road, Farmington Hills, (248) 471-9621
- Namaste Plaza - 34703 Grand River, Farmington Hills, (248) 476-7500
- Taste of Asia - 30390 Grand River Ave., Farmington, (248) 426-0856
- Laxmi Foods Inc. - 29113 W. Eight Mile Road, Farmington Hills, (248) 476-0400

Northern Indian restaurants

- Raj Mahal - 34726 Dequindre, Sterling Heights, (586) 978-8090
- Raj Mahal Banquet Hall - For weddings, all occasions, 11455 Metro Parkway, Sterling Heights, (586) 795-2525
- New Delhi - 37222 Dequindre, Sterling Heights, (586) 264-3333
- Moti Mahal - 2076 Auburn Road, Rochester Hills, (248) 852-0077
- House of India - 28841 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills, (248) 563-7091
- Good Food Company East, (Vegetarian Indian) - 74 W. Maple, Troy, (248) 362-0886
- Passage to India - 3254 W. 12 Mile Road, Berkley, (248) 541-2119
- Priya - 72 W. Maple, Troy, (248) 269-0100, and 36500 Grand River Ave., Farmington Hills, (248) 615-7700. (Serving Southern Indian Cuisine)
- Ruchi Indian Cuisine - 29555 Northwestern Highway, Southfield, (248) 352-3200
- Shallmar Restaurant - 29200 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills, (248) 626-2982
- Sitar Cuisine of India - 29550 Grand River Ave., Farmington Hills, (248) 477-9000
- Tasty Restaurant - 2079 15 Mile Road, Sterling Heights, (586) 268-2333
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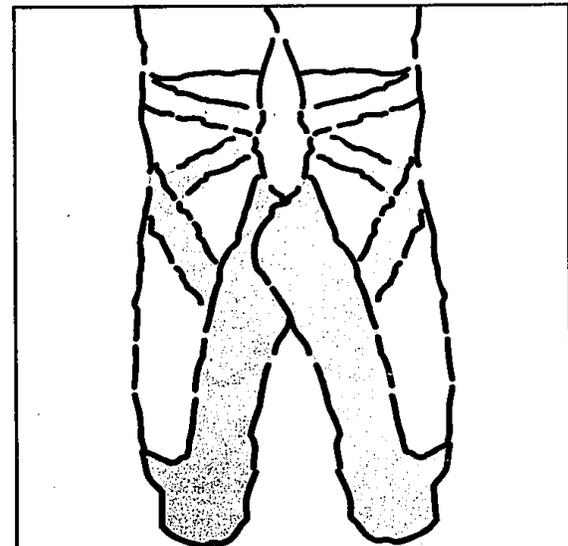
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