

CUCUMBER CHAAT

I did a lot of hiking in the Himalayan foothills when I was in India. During cucumber season, we would always be greeted with this simple, refreshing snack in the village homes that we'd visit. This is still one of my favourite ways to eat cucumbers, and reminds me of sunny days in the mountains.

8 servings

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| 1 | English cucumber |
| 2 | green chilies, stemmed and roughly chopped |
| 2 | cloves garlic, smashed |
| | juice of 1 lime |
| | sea salt |

Trim ends from cucumber and slice lengthwise in half. Slice each half into 4 even wedges. In a mortar and pestle, combine chili, garlic, lime juice and a generous pinch of salt. Pound until a nice loose paste forms and chili and garlic are minced.

Spread chili paste evenly along the cut sides of the cucumber and enjoy!

CLASSIC YELLOW DAL

This is one of the most ubiquitous dishes on the Indian sub-continent. Everywhere you go, you'll always be able to get dal and rice. This food is simple but with sophisticated flavour, and it's just the way my grandmother made it. Ingredients such as yellow lentils, ghee, asafoetida and garam masala can be found in Indian grocery stores and in most supermarkets.

4 to 6 servings

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| 1 cup | yellow lentils |
| 1/2 tsp | turmeric |
| 2 tbsps | butter |
| 3 tbsps | ghee |
| 1 tsp | cumin seeds |
| 1 | small onion, finely chopped. |
| 1 tbsps | minced garlic |
| 1 | medium tomato, finely chopped. |
| 1 tbsps | minced gingerroot |
| 2 | long green chilies, sliced in half lengthwise |
| 2 tbsps | fresh coriander, finely chopped |
| 1 pinch | ground asafoetida |
| 1/2 tsp | ground cayenne |
| 1/2 tsp | ground garam masala |
| | salt, to taste |

Wash the lentils well; drain. In stockpot, combine lentils, 5 cups of water, turmeric and butter. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium and cook until lentils are soft, about 20 to 30 minutes. (A frothy head will start to form...don't worry, it's what you want to happen!)

In small sauté pan, heat ghee on medium-high heat. Add cumin seeds. When cumin starts to splutter, add onion and garlic. Sauté until lightly browned. Add to lentils in stockpot. Add tomato and gingerroot; stir well. Cook for 1 or 2 minutes.

Stir in green chilies, coriander and asafoetida. Cook for 1 minute. Add cayenne and garam masala, and salt to taste. Stir well. Bring to a boil to combine and intensify flavours. If dal becomes too thick, add some warm water. Enjoy!

In 2004, I started at Dish Cooking Studio in midtown Toronto, as the café prep cook. Making scones in the early morning and assisting with cooking classes were a couple of my favourite parts of the job. I yearned to teach my own classes, and started doing so as soon as I got the chance. It's been four years now that I've been a part of chef-owner Trish Magwood's team, and those years have provided some fantastic opportunities. Two that stand out for me are the discovery of my love for teaching, and for orchestrating all the details of a catered event.

The following year, I volunteered at a fundraiser for The Stop Community Food Centre. I didn't know much about The Stop, but what I did know sounded innovative and interesting, and when the position of cook opened up, something compelled me to apply. It all happened very quickly but, by the end of the year, I was hired on at The Stop and, although it seemed like a departure from my original goal, it also felt completely right. What was most compelling was the opportunity I'd have to simultaneously develop my skills as a cook and offer something to others. If ever there were people in need of the benefit of really good, clean food, it is low-income communities. I didn't know much about community food security, but I knew I believed that everyone should have access to good, nourishing food, so I dove in.

It's been two-and-a-half years now that I've been working to make our kitchen at The Stop really serve our community's needs. At the same time, I want our kitchen to run like all the other serious, hard-core kitchens in the city. The fact that people don't pay for our food is no reason we can't be known as a place to go for really good food.

This food is delivered through innovative programming, led by teams of incredibly dedicated and creative staff and volunteers. We have emergency food programs with a food bank and a drop-in that offers breakfast, lunch, snacks and community development programming. Our community kitchens offer members the opportunity to improve their cooking skills, share great food and connect with others in the kitchen. Healthy Beginnings, our perinatal program, supports women throughout pregnancy and labour, and on to breastfeeding and baby food. We have a community garden that produces beautiful organic produce that is shared through our food bank and meal programs, and our education and animation programs bring food to life in classrooms and other communities around the city. Our civic engagement