

FROM THE OLD COUNTRY

BADAM DALIYA

MARSHALL TULLY



Plant-based eating has a long pedigree in South Asia. About one-third of Indians now consider themselves vegetarian – ten times the percentage of people in North America and Western Europe who do.

Thus, if you're looking for ideas about how to incorporate more plant-based meals into your diet, Indian cuisine is a good place to start. Many Indian dishes are fairly simple to prepare, but offer complex flavours. Indian cooks pride themselves on creating

rich, luxuriously textured palettes of herbs and spices. This makes even the most basic meals – such as this one, which begins with everyday porridge – a memorable experience.

Daliya is a traditional Indian whole grain porridge, sometimes served as a savory dish, and sometimes sweet. I first tasted daliya during a recent visit to India, and was instantly blown away by its intense flavour and beautifully creamy texture.

This daliya makes for a filling and incredibly nutrient-rich breakfast, but can also be served as a unique dessert, much like rice pudding.

The centerpiece of this sweet daliya recipe is the chai spice mixture, or masala. Chai is simply the word for “tea” in most of South Asia. Unless you’ve had the rare pleasure of tasting authentic Indian chai (as opposed to the cheap commercially-prepared mixes used in big-chain coffeehouses), then you’ve never truly experienced the real

Badam Daliya

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

1 1/2 cups (375 mL) steel cut oats
2 heaping tbsp (40-50mL) chai masala (see recipe below)
One 946 mL container unsweetened almond milk (if you can only find sweetened almond milk, use only 1 tbsp [15 mL] sugar)
3 tbsp (45 mL) sugar or equivalent of other sweetener
Pinch of salt
Optional: 3/4 cup (225 mL) raisins (about 2 handfuls)
Small handful of chopped or sliced almonds for serving

deal. To cut costs, mass-produced chai blends skimp on ingredients such as cardamom and cloves, and use large amounts of cheaper spices like black pepper and cinnamon as fillers.

In India, every chai aficionado has their own preferred masala recipe, but it's safe to say that they can all agree on one thing: always grind your spices fresh – never use the powdered versions.

This particular concoction is the result of years of kitchen tinkering by my wife, Sonia. Whenever her friends

WHAT YOU'LL DO

In a large dry pot with a tight-fitting lid, toast oats over high heat (uncovered) for 5-7 minutes, or until nicely browned. About 3 minutes into the toasting process, add chai masala. Be sure to stir oats and chai masala frequently to avoid burning.

Add almond milk, stir thoroughly, and reduce heat to low. Add salt and sugar, stir, and cover pot with lid. Cook oats according to package directions or until oats are softened but still have a slight “bite”, which should take approximately 45 minutes. Add raisins if desired, and any additional sugar to taste.

Top with chopped or sliced almonds before serving.

and relatives visit us from India, they unanimously proclaim that hers is the best chai they've ever tasted – and that's including the famous fragrant stuff sold on the streets of Delhi and Mumbai by the chai wallahs. That's a pretty big deal!

Buy your spices from South Asian grocery stores if possible. Not only will they be considerably cheaper, they'll be a lot fresher than the spices you'll find at the supermarket, due to the rapid turnover.

Chai Masala

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

1/2 cup whole green cardamom pods (outer shells not removed)
2 tbsp (30 mL) fennel seeds
1 tbsp (15 mL) broken cassia bark*
1/2 tbsp (7 mL) whole cloves
1/2 tsp (2 mL) black peppercorns

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Grind all ingredients in a coffee grinder or spice grinder. Store spice blend in an airtight glass or ceramic container, in a cool dry place.

Makes 1/2 cup/125 mL of chai masala

To make a cup of chai tea with this masala, simply blend 1 level teaspoon (5 mL) of your favourite black tea with 1/3-1/2 teaspoon (2 mL) of the masala in a tea strainer. Allow the tea and masala to steep for about five minutes before drinking. Add 3/4 cup (225 mL) milk (or soy milk, almond milk, etc.) and 1/2 cup water. Simmer tea and liquid ingredients for 3-5 minutes. Strain and serve.

***Cassia can easily be found in South Asian grocery stores. It's sometimes labeled as its Hindi name, *dalchini*. If you can't find it, the equivalent quantity of cinnamon bark will do just fine.**