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The Temporary Vegetarian: Vegan Indian Stir-Fried Cauliflower

BY ELAINE LOUIE SEPTEMBER 20, 2010 8:00 AM



“This is my favorite northern Indian street food,” said Hemant Mathur, the executive chef and an owner of Tulsi, a restaurant expected to open in November in Manhattan. He was speaking of the dish called gobi taka tin, or stir-fried cauliflower with peppers and tomatoes.

“Taka tin is the sound of the dish cooking, the sound of the metal spoon hitting against the metal pan as the chef keeps the vegetables moving around in the spices and breaking up the too-large pieces of cauliflower.”

The chef, 43, said he first ate the dish when he was 18, in Jaipur. Now he eats it once a week, for dinner.

“It is very simple,” he said. “It is sweet from the peppers, and sour from the tomatoes, and it uses not too many spices.” One more selling point: its brilliant color.

Gobi Taka Tin: Vegan Stir-Fried Cauliflower With Peppers and Tomatoes

Ingredients

Yield 4 servings

Time 40 minutes

- 1 large whole cauliflower, cut into 2-inch florets
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 3/4 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 to 2 fresh Thai bird chilies (about 1 inch long), seeded and finely minced
- 3/4 teaspoon ground coriander
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- Small pinch chili powder
- 1/3 teaspoon turmeric
- Salt
- Half a small orange bell pepper, cut into 1-inch dice
- Half a small red bell pepper, cut into 1-inch dice
- 1 1/2 very large heirloom tomatoes, or 3 large plum tomatoes, cut into 1-inch dice
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro.

Method

1. Immerse the cauliflower florets in a bowl of cold water and set aside.
2. Place a large, heavy-bottomed skillet with a lid over high heat, and add the oil. When the oil is shimmering, add cumin seeds and cook, stirring rapidly, until golden brown, about 30 seconds. Add 1 minced chili, coriander, cumin, chili powder and turmeric.
3. Drain the cauliflower, add to the skillet, and sauté for 5 minutes, stirring constantly to avoid burning. (If the mixture starts to stick, add 1 to 3 tablespoons of water.) Season with salt to taste. Stir. Adjust spiciness to taste, adding part (or all) of the second chili, if desired. Reduce heat to medium low. Cover, and continue to cook, lifting the lid and stirring occasionally, until the cauliflower is tender, 8 to 10 minutes.
4. Add orange and red bell peppers, cover, and cook for 2 minutes. Add tomatoes, cover, and cook for another 2 minutes. Increase heat to high and cook uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes are soft and most of the liquid has evaporated. Stir in the cilantro, serve immediately. If desired, serve with rice or bread.

Source: Adapted from Hemant Mathur, executive chef and a partner at Tulsi, Manhattan