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Herbs of course are not just for medicine. They are used all over the world for their colours and flavours and are an indispensable part of a fine meal. Here's a chance, courtesy of Nettie Cronish (the Vegetarian Gourmet!), to try an authentic Far Eastern recipe. Good luck!

Curries

We consider curries native to India and do not realize how many different types there are. There seems to be many misconceptions about curries in general. Curry is a fashion of cooking: a process whereby meats, fish, vegetables or even fruit are cooked in varying combinations of ground herbs and spices, (known as curry pastes), to produce a stew like dish. All dishes that are hot and spicy are not curries, nor are all curries fiery hot. Curry powder is an amalgam of some "Indian" spices best applied to the flavorings of curry dips and dishes where a hint of curry

influence is desired.

In a Thai curry, the proportion of solids to liquid is small. As they are always eaten over large mounds of steamed rice, just a few solids suffice and the flavour of the spicy, highly flavored gravy is extended by the bland rice.

Curry pastes should be a marvelous, aromatic mixture of freshly ground herbs and spices. When preparing a curry paste, it is preferable to first use a mortar and pestle with the hard fibrous ingredients rather than including them with other ingredients in a food processor or blender. The pounding of the pestle crushes the husks and fibers releasing the oils and juices, whereas the processor and blender merely cut the spices.

For the modern kitchen cook with no time to spare, a food processor in conjunction with an electric spice or coffee type grinder can be used. This does not however eliminate the requirement for a mortar and pestle. For mashing moist herbs like lemon grass, garlic and shallots there is no substitute. However, the whole dried spices (chilies, cloves), give out their best aroma when pulverized by a good grinder. When you are preparing a paste, single out the hard and dried spices and pound or grind them first before proceeding further.

RED CURRY PASTE.

14 medium, dried red chilies, seeded or 1 tbs. ground red chili powder (cayenne).

2 shallots, minced.

1 tsp. caraway seeds or 1 tsp. ground caraway.

1 tbs. whole coriander seeds or 1 tbs. ground.

8 pieces galangal root (Laos), chopped or powdered.

2 tbs coriander roots, minced.

1 tsp, salt.

1 lime peel, finely chopped.
1 stalk lemon grass, minced.
1 tsp. whole black peppercorns or 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper.
1/2 tsp. kaffir lime powder (pew makrut) or substitute 1 bay leaf.
1 tbs. garlic, minced.
4 tbs. vegetable oil.

Method.

1. Place the whole dried spices (chilies, caraway, coriander, galangal root and peppercorns) in an electric spice grinder or mortar and grind or pound to a powder. Omit this step if ground spices are used. Empty this powder into the food processor and add the remaining ingredients, including the oil, and process or pound to a smooth, even paste.

Now that you've got this part together here comes the recipe for the meal!

THAI FRIED CURRIED RICE Serves 6

3 tbs. safflower oil.
2 tbs. red curry paste.
8 oz. broccoli, steamed.
1 cup cauliflower, steamed.
2 lbs. cooked long grain rice (2 cups).
2 tbs. finely chopped shallots.
2 red chilies, seeded and finely chopped.
2 medium onions, finely chopped.
1 tbs. lemon or lime juice.
1 tbs. soya sauce.

Method

1. Heat the oil in a wok or large frying pan and stir the curry paste for 3 minutes. Add the steamed vegetables and stir fry until well heated through. Add the rice, mix well and continue to stir fry until heated through. Transfer to a serving dish.
2. Sprinkle shallots over the top with chilies.
3. Sprinkle with chopped onions, lemon juice and soya sauce before serving.