

Indian-Style Spinach with Fresh Cheese (Saag Paneer)

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 13: Indian Classics Made Easy

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Paneer, the fresh cheese called for in this Indian recipe, is available in some specialty markets, but it couldn't be more simple to make at home with whole milk and buttermilk. For a spinach sauce with great flavor, we combine spinach and mustard greens and spice them up with onion, garlic, ginger and jalapeño, plus some chopped tomatoes. Pureeing some cashews into the sauce adds richness and body.

Serves 4 to 6


To ensure that the cheese is firm, wring it tightly in step 2 and be sure to use two plates that nestle together snugly. Use commercially produced cultured buttermilk in this recipe. We found that some locally produced buttermilks didn't sufficiently coagulate the milk. Serve with basmati rice.

INGREDIENTS

Cheese

- 3 quarts whole milk
- 3 cups buttermilk
- 1 tablespoon salt

Spinach Sauce

- 1 (10-ounce) bag curly-leaf spinach, rinsed
- 3/4 pound mustard greens, stemmed and rinsed
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter 
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- Salt and pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 1 jalapeño chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained and chopped coarse
- 1/2 cup roasted cashews, chopped coarse
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. FOR THE CHEESE:** Line colander with triple layer of cheesecloth and set in sink. Bring milk to boil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Whisk in buttermilk and salt, turn off heat, and let stand for 1 minute. Pour milk mixture through cheesecloth and let curds drain for 15 minutes.
 - 2.** Pull edges of cheesecloth together to form pouch. Twist edges of cheesecloth together, firmly squeezing out as much liquid as possible from cheese curds. Place taut, twisted cheese pouch between 2 large plates and weigh down top plate with heavy Dutch oven. Set aside at room temperature until cheese is firm and set, at least 45 minutes. Remove cheesecloth and cut cheese into ½-inch pieces. (Left uncut, cheese can be wrapped in plastic wrap and refrigerated for up to 3 days.)
 - 3. FOR THE SPINACH SAUCE:** Place spinach in large microwave-safe bowl, cover, and microwave until wilted, about 3 minutes. When cool enough to handle, chop enough spinach to measure 1/3 cup and set aside. Transfer remaining spinach to blender and wipe out bowl. Place mustard greens in now-empty bowl, cover, and microwave until wilted, about 4 minutes. When cool enough to handle, chop enough mustard greens to measure 1/3 cup and transfer to bowl with chopped spinach. Transfer remaining mustard greens to blender.
 - 4.** Meanwhile, melt butter in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add cumin seeds, coriander, paprika, cardamom, and cinnamon and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add onion and ¾ teaspoon salt; cook, stirring frequently, until softened, about 3 minutes. Add garlic, ginger, and jalapeño; cook, stirring frequently, until lightly browned and just beginning to stick to pan, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in tomatoes and cook mixture until pan is dry and tomatoes are beginning to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove skillet from heat.
 - 5.** Transfer half of onion mixture to blender with greens. Add half of cashews and water; process until smooth, about 1 minute. Return puree to skillet.
 - 6.** Return skillet to medium-high heat, stir in chopped greens and buttermilk, and bring to simmer. Reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until flavors have blended, 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Gently fold in cheese cubes and cook until just heated through, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to serving dish, sprinkle with remaining cashews and cilantro, and serve.
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TECHNIQUE

BRINGING HOME SAAG PANEER

Paneer, the fresh cheese called for in this recipe, is available in some specialty markets, but it couldn't be simpler to make at home. Cooking the spinach sauce is also easy.
