

Cheetie's Savory Coconut Cornmeal Upma

Upma is a traditional Indian cornmeal porridge that Cheetie (a talented and beloved chef who grew up eating this at home) says can be prepared many ways. This is the way we made it when we cooked together for the show. There are several steps, but none of them are difficult, and many can be done ahead. It all adds up to one of the most fragrant, beautiful, tempting meals I've had in ages. The layers of nuanced flavor and the variety of textures are lessons in how to assemble a one-bowl meal.

Makes 4 to 6 servings

Upma Porridge

- 5 tablespoons coconut oil, divided
- 1 1/2 cups diced yellow onion, divided
- 1 tablespoon minced green cayenne or jalapeno chile or 1 teaspoon minced Thai or serrano chile
- 1 teaspoon salt, plus more to taste
- 2 cups full-fat coconut milk, well-stirred
- 5 cups water
- 1 cup stoneground cornmeal
- 2 tablespoons white urad dal (split black gram lentil without husk) or yellow split peas
- 1 (6-inch) curry leaf sprig, leaves removed, and stem discarded
- 2 teaspoons finely minced ginger
- 2 teaspoons finely minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1/2 cup heavy cream, plus more if needed

Vegetable Topping

- 2 tablespoons ghee or coconut oil
- 1/2 cup diced yellow onion
- 1 teaspoon salt, plus more to taste
- 1 tablespoon minced green cayenne or jalapeno chile or 1 teaspoon minced Thai or serrano chile
- 2 teaspoon finely minced ginger
- 2 teaspoons finely minced garlic
- 1 cup diced, roasted sweet potato (recipe follows)
- 1 cup diced cremini or shiitake mushrooms, roasted (recipe follows)
- 1/4 cup chicken or vegetable stock
- 4 cups stemmed and thinly shredded kale

Garnish with: 1 cup roasted, salted peanuts and chopped cilantro

1. For the porridge: Warm 3 tablespoons of the coconut oil in a large, heavy saucepan over medium-high heat. When the oil begins to sizzle, stir in 3/4 cup of the onion, the chile, and salt. Cook until tender, about 4 minutes, stirring often.
2. Stir in 1 2/3 cups of the coconut milk and the water. Bring to a boil. Whisking continuously, sprinkle in the cornmeal. Bring back to a boil, whisking continuously. Reduce the heat and simmer until the cornmeal is tender and the porridge thickens, about 25 minutes, stirring occasionally; stir more often as the porridge thickens to ensure it doesn't scorch or stick on the bottom. Season with salt. Cover and keep warm over low heat.
3. Warm the remaining 2 tablespoons of coconut oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. When the oil begins to sizzle, stir in the urad dal and cook until toasted, about 1 minute, stirring continuously.
4. Stir in the curry leaves, taking care to avoid spatters.
5. Stir in the remaining 3/4 cup onion, the ginger, garlic, and turmeric. Cook until the onion is tender, about 4 minutes, stirring often.
6. Add the remaining 1/3 cup coconut milk and the cream, and stir well to loosen any browned bits from the bottom of the skillet. Stir into the porridge. Season with salt.
7. Cover the porridge and keep warm over very low heat while preparing the vegetable topping, stirring occasionally. Add a splash of cream if the porridge gets too thick.
8. For the topping: Warm the ghee in the skillet over medium-high heat.
9. Stir in the onion and salt and cook until tender, about 4 minutes, stirring often.
10. Stir in the chile, ginger, and garlic and cook for 1 minute while stirring.
11. Fold in the sweet potatoes and mushrooms.
12. Add the vegetable stock and scrape the pan to loosen the browned glaze.
13. Add the kale in large handfuls, tossing with tongs to lightly wilt. Season with salt.
14. To serve, spoon the porridge into serving bowls and top with the vegetable mixture. Serve hot, garnished with peanuts and cilantro.

For the mushrooms:

1. Place a rimmed sheet pan in the oven and preheat the oven to 375°F.
2. Place the diced mushrooms in a small bowl, drizzle with ghee or coconut oil, and sprinkle with a big pinch of ground coriander. (Do not salt. Roasting them without salt deepens their flavor and keeps them from turning soggy.) Toss to coat, and then spread in a single layer on the hot pan.
3. Roast until tender and deeply browned, stirring occasionally, about 30 minutes.

For the sweet potatoes:

1. Place a rimmed sheet pan in the oven and preheat the oven to 375°F.
2. Peel a small sweet potato and cut into 1/2-inch cubes. Place in a small bowl, drizzle with ghee or coconut oil, and sprinkle with big pinches of salt and ground coriander. Toss to coat, and then spread in a single layer on the hot pan.
3. Roast until tender with caramelized edges, about 20 minutes.