Meherwan’s Apple Sabzi

Gorgeous aromatic spices are key to the tempting flavors and textures in this dish from friend Meherwan Irani. He uses spices from Spicewalla, his spice company based in Asheville, but no matter the brand you choose to use, they must be fresh and fragrant. You owe it to all of your recipes to give the spices in your cabinet the sniff test: If they don’t wow you with bright, pungent aroma, they are past their prime and should be replaced. Meherwan is the Executive Chef and Chief Chaiwalla of several restaurants, but this is the recipe he chose to prepare when I asked him to make something that reminds him of home and the great cooks in his family.

Makes 4 servings

2 tablespoons coconut oil
1 teaspoon yellow mustard seed
6 to 8 fresh or dried curry leaves
6 whole black peppercorns
1 medium-size red onion, diced (about 1 1/2 cups)
1 red or green bird’s eye chile, very thinly sliced
1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
2 sweet, crisp apples, peeled, cored and cut into large-bite size pieces (about 4 cups)
3/4 finely grated fresh coconut, thawed if previously frozen
1/2 cup well-stirred coconut milk (not lite)
1/2 cup water

Garnish with: Fresh cilantro leaves and a pinch of garam masala (optional)
Serve with: Hot, freshly cooked basmati rice and/or warm bread (such as naan, roti, or chapati)

1. Warm the coconut oil in a large, deep, heavy saucepan over high heat until shimmering.
2. Add the mustard seed. Cook until they begin to pop, about 30 seconds and lower the heat to medium.
3. Add the curry leaves and peppercorns; cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly.
4. Stir in the onion, chile, and salt. Increase the heat to medium-high and cook until the onion is soft and deeply browned, about 7 minutes, stirring often.
5. Reduce the heat to medium and stir in the turmeric, cumin powder, and coriander powder; cook until they release their aroma, about 30 seconds, stirring constantly. Add a splash of water (about 1 tablespoon) to prevent scorching.
6. Stir in the apple and grated coconut. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring well to loosen the spices from the bottom of the pan.
7. Stir in the coconut milk and water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer gently until the apple is tender, but not falling apart, 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season with salt.
8. Garnish with cilantro and a pinch of garam masala, if using. Serve warm with hot rice and/or warm bread.

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