

foodism

FEBRUARY 2021 | ISSUE 9

Food as an Expression of

LOVE



Red
INGREDIENTS
& HEALTH



There's
something
about

PIZZA

A
Deep
Dive into
RED
WINE



लुण[®]
Lūnā

BOTTLE CONTAINS
8 HIBISCUS FLOWERS





Hibiscus Double Chocolate Mousse (Eggless):

Ingredients- Milk, Fresh Cream, Marshmallows, White & Dark Chocolate Bars, Edible Hibiscus Flowers.

Take Dark Chocolate bar & melt it on a double boiler till it turns into a silky consistency and set aside. Take a pan on medium heat add milk, fresh cream & Marshmallow till everything combines into a one. Now add half of this mixture to the Dark chocolate and pour in cups, Refrigerate for 1 hour.

Take White Chocolate Bar & melt it on a double boiler till it turns into a silky consistency. Add a bit of hibiscus syrup from the bottle to the mixture to give it the Hibiscus Flavour. Add the remaining mixture of the Milk, Fresh cream & Marshmallow to the White Chocolate. Take the Dark Chocolate mousse from the fridge & pour this mixture over it making two layers. Refrigerate till set.

Top the mousse up with a Edible hibiscus Flower to tie in the flavour & make it look like a piece of art.

One Scoop Hibiscus Please- (Guilt Free after meal Dessert, No Cooking)

Ingredients- Edible Hibiscus Flowers, Your personal set of ice cream (Vanilla, or Chocolate preferred), Roasted Almonds for Garnishing (Optional), Spoon for presentation.

Take one Hibiscus Flower pod and carefully open its centre so the petals don't break. With another spoon, add a Dollop of the Ice Cream to the centre of the Flower. The petals will hold the ice cream from melting away. Add a pinch of Roasted Almonds as Garnish and place the whole Flower in a spoon.

You can add a bit of the Hibiscus Flower syrup from the Jar on the Ice cream or at the side to give it a more sophisticated look.

Available on 

and  +91 98335 51688

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foodism

“if it’s food, it’s foodism”

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FROM THE FOUNDER'S Desk

Dear Food-fanatics,

Welcome to our 'Red' Issue!

February, the month of love is upon us and we delve deeper into how it resonates with all of us who adore food earnestly. While we call our 10th edition the 'Red Issue' the intersectionality, of course, lies with love and its various manifestations in our lives. From how food has become the universal expression of love, to the passion with which our Foodism stars create recipes and content - love comes in all shapes, forms and aromas.

We are inaugurating a brand-new segment, called 'Foodism Recommends' from this issue forward, wherein every month our experts will acquaint you with a new book, show or movie that we feel you would love to watch or add to your culinary repertoire.

Keep in tune with love as an overarching theme, we ran a contest called 'Eat-Click-Share 'the love edition' earlier in the month and were quite overwhelmed with the response we received. It truly delights us to see you all share your love for food with us. We have two more contests lined up for you for Feb, so make sure you keep an eye on our website foodism.xyz and our Instagram [@foodism.xyz](https://www.instagram.com/foodism.xyz) for updates.

There are a lot of interesting things in store for you in this edition - from red recipes to a guide to red-wines, from special interviews to engaging insiders, we continue the tradition of offering you the best that the world of food has to offer. We hope that you will enjoy reading our February edition as much as we loved creating it for you.

So, here's to that beautiful feeling called love, may you experience and express it in abundance this month!

Vyom Shah

Vyom Shah
FOUNDER, FOODISM



“ Food is symbolic of love when words are inadequate.”

— Alan D. Wolfelt



FOOD

as an Expression of Love

Regardless of how one slices it or dices it, food and love are tied quite inextricably. When one talks about love, we think more about traditional romantic notions associated with it; we tend to forget that two of the most critical aspects of our lives - love and food remain irrevocably entwined and enmeshed.

The most cherished memory that Shweta Sharma, an IT specialist in Delhi, holds close to her heart pertaining to her relationship with her now-husband, is of the first time he cooked for her "I had been having a bad day at work, added to that, the fact that I had forgotten to carry my lunch, really aggravated me. Having mentioned it to him in passing, imagine my surprise when come lunchtime, he makes a special delivery to the office with a home-cooked meal that he had quickly scrambled together so that I wouldn't have to order in, or go hungry. That act of care and love made me sure that he was the one."

Food as an expression of love is demonstrated not via the quantity served on a plate but rather by the care that goes into its preparation. Be it a mother who wakes up early in the morning to prepare food for her children's lunch or the joy of carefully planned meals one tends to begin with in new relationships - food and love dance with one another fluidly to the beat of culinary expression.

A Primal Experience

If one looks at the onset of our lives - as soon as an infant is born, it is provided with nourishment, and all through our lives - this said act becomes synonymous with care, comfort, and love. Be it a tradition of expressing love through giving chocolates on a specific day or how having a simple meal can evoke nostalgic memories that you treasure -there's a reason why it's called comfort food, after all.

Hina Razia, an HR consultant in Mumbai, lost her father a couple of years ago, and some of her most cherished memories of him are when he would cook for them - "My father cooked exceptionally well and loved to experiment in the kitchen. Heavy-handed with spices, my mother would say, but we loved all his creations. Due to his busy schedule - he would end up taking charge of the kitchen only when our mother was unwell - so delicious were his preparations that as children, my sibling and I would wish that our mother would fall ill more often, just so he could cook for us", she adds with a laugh.



The simple act of having meals together as a family is one that strengthens bonds, and even when you look at other cultures, taking a casserole over to a friend or family member recovering from an illness, or mourning a loss, is an act of love and care.



Sharing is Caring

As someone who grew up in a boarding school, Prerna, a financial analyst in the city, recalls that the one thing that all boarders longed for the most, was home-cooked meals "Whenever someone from my hometown would be visiting the area, my parents would send a care package full of home-cooked meals and treats, and that would be the best feeling in the world. As much as I loved to eat them, I loved sharing them with my friends as well. These little incidents of shared meals and special delicacies that our mothers were famous for, are tales that have been carried forth through the years. Even now, when my friends and I get together, inadvertently there will be a mention of some meal that had come from our homes, which we all relished"

Looking at the various expressions of love through food, one realizes that food becomes an actual manifestation of our feelings beyond the normal ambits of love. Be it cooking food for people keeping in mind their dietary restrictions or choices, out of love and respect for them, or nourishing your own body with healthy foods as an act of self-love - food undergoes a transformative journey of being representative of our emotions and connections.

Love Made Me Do It

Hemant S, a business owner in Kolkata, says 'The pandemic hit my business hard, and I ended up

being at home for much longer than I had anticipated. Paranoid about the disease and my family's health, I ended up learning how to make a lot of things on my own. From baking my own bread to trying to make restaurant-style chili paneer - just because I didn't want my family to be stepping outside to eat, or ordering in. My wife is a teacher, and while she would be holding zoom classes during the day, I would be busy experimenting in the kitchen. I do feel a sense of pride when I say that my family enjoyed quite a few of my creations born out of love and concern for their well-being"

Whether it is being offered a simple cup of coffee or chai when you're back home from a tiring day or trying to be a 'MasterChef' for your partner when you've been nothing but a 'Culinary Disaster' all this while - communicating your love through food is a tale as old as time.

As an act of love or a conduit of memory, food remains the most perfect expression of our emotions. Playing a pivotal role in every physical, recreational and relational arena of our lives - food sustains, nourishes and heals us. Across myriad forms of love, be it relationships, socialization, community or culture - the mere sight and aroma of food is enough to ingrain and evoke beloved memories. While we celebrate the month of love – let's also revel in the incredible joy of eating food steeped in it.

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Coffee Tonic

INGREDIENTS

Ice
60 ml cold brew coffee or
a teaspoon instant coffee powder
Bengal Bay Indian tonic water

METHOD

Mix together, stir & serve



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BENGAL BAY

100% NATURAL

SPICED
ORANGE & BASIL
TONIC WATER

250 ML

A glass of Tropical Bay cocktail, a yellowish-orange drink with ice and a slice of citrus, is shown on the left. In the foreground, a large, dark brown pinecone sits on a wooden board, with several slices of citrus fruit (orange and lemon) scattered around it. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a tropical setting.

Tropical Bay

INGREDIENTS

Ice
30ml gin or whiskey
60ml pineapple juice
Fresh basil leaves
Bengal Bay Spiced Orange
& Basil Tonic Water

METHOD

Mix together, stir & serve

“Red is the ultimate cure for sadness”

Bill Blass

REELING IN THE POWER OF RED

Love is in the air and loving yourself is the most significant way to celebrate this beautiful emotion.

Loving others is easy but loving yourself takes a lot of courage and acceptance. One of the best ways to do so is by keeping your body and mind fit. They say every hue in nature brings in a sea full of benefits and can fill our life with vibrancy. Hence, when you decide to paint your life red, make sure you incorporate a dash of vermillion foods in your diet and reap the benefits as well.

Paint it Red

Red runs in our veins. Vigorous and dynamic. Red is the colour of love - passionate and all-consuming. Red is the colour of power - absolute and irrevocable. Red stands out like a ruby in a cluster of stones - brilliant and invigorating.

This month of love and heart health is all about the colour red. No life is complete without this tempestuous hue - so why should our food be devoid of it?

With so many veggies, fruits, and other edibles dotted with the colour red and loaded with essential nutrients, you are bound to give in to the temptation and dig your teeth into them. So, let us dive deeper into the red sea of foods, shall we?

Red is the Colour of Life

Red in foods is one of the most vibrant and exuberant colours out there, and it became the first colour we discovered as homo sapiens. So enamoured were we with the tint that we eventually made it synonymous with celebration and life itself. Since our festivities are incomplete without food, the best way to celebrate the month of love is to talk about foods that are drenched in the colour of joy, happiness, and celebration.



Veggies that Shine Bright in Red

Red Bell Peppers, Beetroot, Chillies and Peppers, Red Onions, Red Radishes, Red Cabbage, Radicchio, Red Potatoes, Red Spinach, and Carrots to name a few - get their vibrant hue because they are packed with Lycopene, a carotenoid hydrocarbon antioxidant powerhouse that does all the magic.

These veggies are a mix of tangy, sweet, spicy, and crunchy and pack a mean punch of vitamin C, vitamin A, minerals, and phytonutrients



Peppers and Chillies

Chilies and peppers brim with a phytochemical called Capsaicin, which is excellent for arthritis and migraines. Piquant and crunchy, peppers, have an abundance of vitamin A, C, E, which can give a healthy pink glow to your skin and make your tresses shinier and beguiling. The best way to extract the maximum amount of nutrients from these spicy gems is to consume them raw or use them in a tempering to wrench the flavour out of them. Use them in your salads or make a marinade with them – you can even add them to your sauces and chutneys for a healthy and peppery zing!



Leafy Veggies

A nice coleslaw sandwich with some crispy and hearty Radicchio, Red Lettuce Leaves, and Red Cabbage, or a red smoothie with a fresh bunch of Red Spinach, juicy red tomatoes, and some chilies is all you need to start your day with a rad red breakfast. You will get a variety of nutrients from these leafy reds like vitamin A, B6, C, E, and the number of antioxidants garnered from these delicious veggies is as good as having some superfoods.

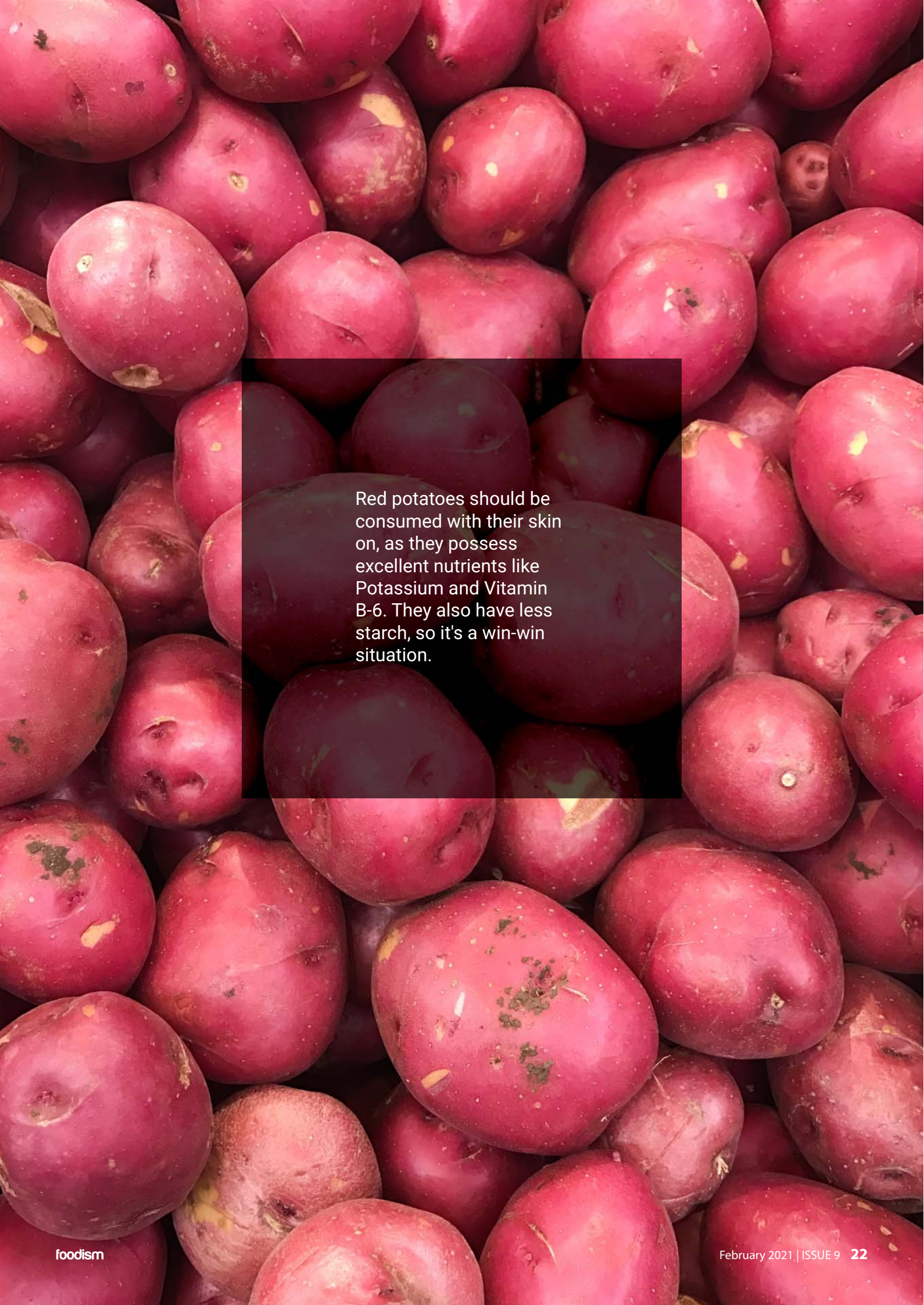


RED SPINACH




Other Red Veggies

Time and again, we've been told that beetroot is a potent root vegetable that is brilliantly hued bright red and secretes a lot of colour that has been used as a natural food colouring agent for ages. On the other hand, the acidic and piquant flavour of red onions makes our meals delicious and lends an umami flavour when appropriately fried. The health benefits of this pungent vegetable are innumerable. It keeps you cool in summers, while the powerful phytochemicals do wonders for your liver and give you an immunity boost.



Red potatoes should be consumed with their skin on, as they possess excellent nutrients like Potassium and Vitamin B-6. They also have less starch, so it's a win-win situation.



Red Radish is a pungent member of the cruciferous root family packed with fiber, folate, antioxidants, and other essential nutrients that keep your gut happy and your food bright and peppy with zesty undertones. Add in some nice thin slices on your salad, and it will elevate the flavours threefold.



Fruity Gems that are Bright Red

Red fruits shine like bright rubies in the fruit category for their glistening crimson colour and often look so beautiful and irresistible, you would want to take a sinful bite of it. Be it berries like Strawberries, Raspberries, Goji berries, Cranberries, or other fruits like Apples, Tomatoes, Red Dragon Fruit, Red Pear, Watermelon, Red Grapes, Pomegranate, Plum, Cherries, Blood Orange, Lingonberries, Rambutan, Red Currants, Rose Hip. These ruby-like fruits are brimming with antioxidants, Vitamin A, C, K, and anthocyanins that keep you healthy and cancer-free.



Berries

A mix of sweet and tangy, these dazzling fruits make excellent dessert components or even standalone indulgence. Berries have some excellent nutrients waiting to be absorbed by your body for maximum immunity against different ailments and conditions. They can fight cancer and add a healthy pink glow to your skin. The best way to consume them is either raw or by making fruit smoothies. This way, no nutrition gets lost, and you get to try out different combinations as well. Berries like Strawberries, Raspberries, Cranberries, Goji berries, Lingonberries, etc., are overflowing with essential nutrients like fiber, anthocyanins, vitamin A, C, E, and keep your heart healthy and your cholesterol under control.

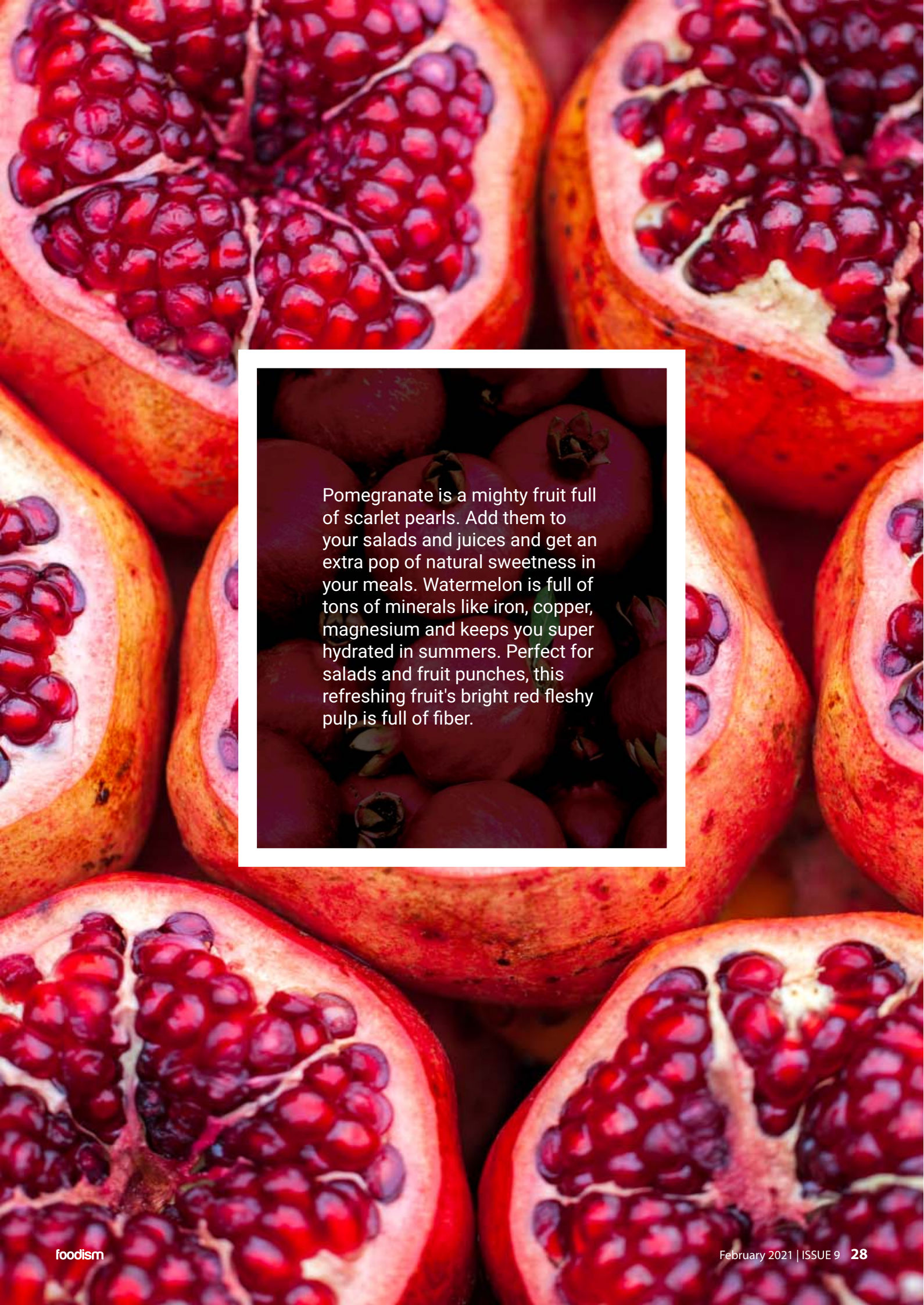


DRIED GOJI BERRIES


Other Red Fruits

Apples are deliciously fleshy and good for your body; so popular is the fruit that the age-old adage “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” comes to mind instantly. An excellent source of fiber, they’re just as good for your skin.






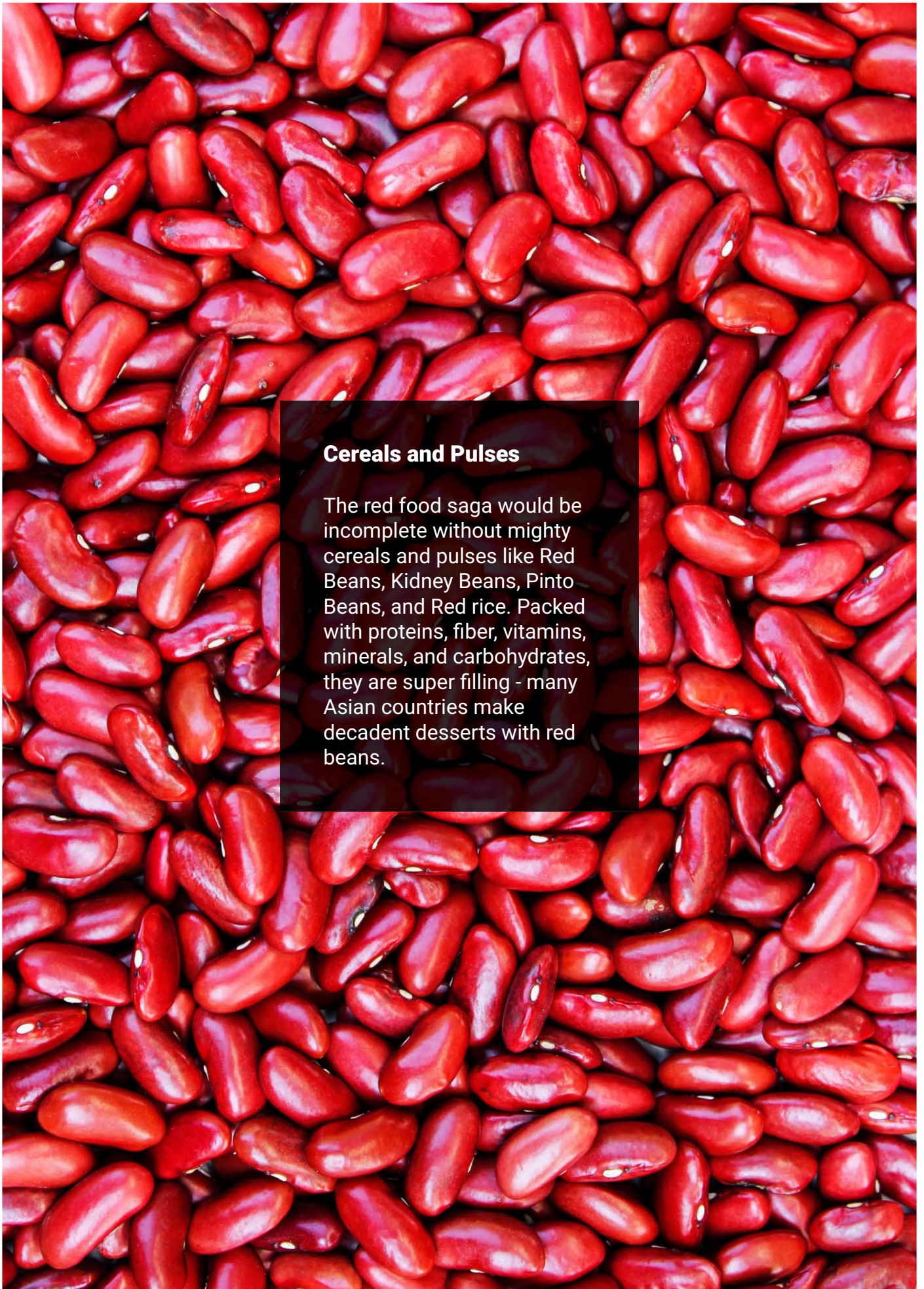
Pomegranate is a mighty fruit full of scarlet pearls. Add them to your salads and juices and get an extra pop of natural sweetness in your meals. Watermelon is full of tons of minerals like iron, copper, magnesium and keeps you super hydrated in summers. Perfect for salads and fruit punches, this refreshing fruit's bright red fleshy pulp is full of fiber.



Red grapes are the reason red wine has been such a hit through the ages. The benefits of fresh and fermented grapes are innumerable. A glass of wine every night or a fresh glass of grape juice will keep most ailments at bay.



Tomatoes are one of the most significant sources of Lycopene, an antioxidant that keeps you healthy and fights cancer and other ailments like a true hero. It gives a bright red color to many different ingredients and takes great care of your body.



Cereals and Pulses

The red food saga would be incomplete without mighty cereals and pulses like Red Beans, Kidney Beans, Pinto Beans, and Red rice. Packed with proteins, fiber, vitamins, minerals, and carbohydrates, they are super filling - many Asian countries make decadent desserts with red beans.



Red rice is gluten-free, has loads of fiber, and helps in losing weight. Filled with antioxidants and other essential nutrients, it is an excellent substitute for white rice.

Red foods add brilliant colour to your meals. Not including them in your life can be considered a sin that you wouldn't want to commit. So make sure you add enough red ingredients to all your dishes and let the royal color bring happiness, power, and zeal into your life.



THE MISTRESSES OF SPICES

Life without spices is a big no-no! They add a punchy 'tadka' to our food and life, and the world is going gaga about how good our spice concoctions are! Taking the baton of making the best artisanal spices are a mother-daughter duo! Their 'tokri' is brimming with some aromatic masalas, and all you need to do is grab a basket and make your cooking experience easy-peasy and fun!



Masala Tokri, Mumbai

Their Journey

Masala Tokri came into existence in 2019, but the business's foundation had already been laid down 20 years ago with their family business of 'Masala Chakkis' where they catered mainly to B2B brands. Urmila Samant, the matriarch and culinary expert of the family, studied spices and the spice processing technology for 2 years before she started creating her concoctions of zesty and fresh spice mixes and ground spices. These products represented different regions of India and were meant to make the culinary experience rich, authentic, but relatively easy.

In late 2018, Co-founder Aarti Samant noticed that her mother's homegrown spices were becoming a talking point within the women community. Urmila's passion for spices drove her to create her own network of women on WhatsApp via which she started selling her hand-pounded spices. Her customers loved her products so much that the network grew globally. Women travelled from Dubai and London and packed up her spices to sell further because of the sheer quality and authenticity of blends, sourced from India's various heartlands.

Masala Tokri was launched with a premium gourmet spice brand positioning, hand-crafted and inspired by blends from local regions of India.

The Trend-Setters in the Artisanal Spice World

When it comes to starting a Masala brand, the competition is cut-throat but what sets them apart is that they don't compromise on quality. She shares, "We studied the market diligently over a year and realised that we could not compete with giants like MDH or Everest who have built their brands over a span of about 100 years. We felt like there was a huge gap in the market of aspirational spices that actually had the capacity of living up to the market standards, yet provide an experience that didn't compromise on the quality. We aimed to strive for that experience."

Their pricing is premium, and they are catering to a specific upper-middle-class audience who love indulging in right quality products, especially when it comes to food. There is a massive change in India's food consumption behaviour, as customers are looking for healthier/better quality produce/ingredients. They really want to tap into that behaviour. Hence they are on the other side of the spectrum creating nutritional | Best Quality | local Indian recipes.

Their products are vegan, 100% Natural and chemical-free.

Their Product Range

Masala Tokri has formed a niche in the spice market with its artisanal approach and quality control. They have four interesting USPs:

1. The ingredients they source are of A-grade export quality. They maintain strict global standards when sourcing their raw material; hence, they label themselves as a premium spice brand.
2. All the recipes hail from different indigenous heartlands of India and have a lot of provincial significance.
3. Their process of manufacturing is quite different from all the other commercial spice brands. They dark roast their spices in roasting chambers and hand-pound them in their unique machines explicitly hand-crafted for this purpose. These machines leave a somewhat coarse texture and enhance the spices' oil, colour, and aroma. The moment you rip open a packet, the whole room will get filled with the aroma.
4. Their products are 100% natural with zero-added chemicals or preservatives, and the shelf-life of their products is up to a year.

Their spice blends are turning a lot of heads worldwide, quips Aarti, "Some of our spice blends that are a house favourite will surely win your heart as well. Apart from the regular blends, my top 3 favourites are 1. Maharashtrian Goda Masala 2. Goan Fish Masala 3. Awadhi Biryani Masala."

The Entire Process

They have an elaborate process through which they manufacture a wide range of artisanal spices and spice blends. She explains, "We source our ingredients (akkha masalas) from organic farms all over the country viz; Sangli, Tamilnadu, Satara etc. The ingredients we source are of export A+ quality, which we are extremely stringent about. We segregate all the raw material as per the secret blends and recipes that my mother, Urmila, has created. Post that, we go through a dry roasting process where the segregated spices are roasted together so that oils and colour remain intact.

Then our spices go into our specially crafted pounding machines which we have created ourselves. These machines have the same technique which our grandmas used to follow – the stone-pounding technique."

They believe that grinding spices in commercial machines rob off the oils and don't bring out the essence naturally, the way pounding does. She reveals, "We are extremely passionate about this process, something which we've developed over the years, benefits of being in the spices business."



The Challenges

One of their biggest challenges was to hack the offline general trade market. They have always been an online brand at the core of it, and with the lockdown, they saw a massive opportunity in offline trade and didn't want to lose out on the opportunity. She shares, "Since we had no background to start with, it was a challenge to connect with the right distributor partners who could help us expand in the offline world. After a lot of scouting, we are extremely proud to have partnered with ZIDA Impex – A Kumar Builders Company in Pune for exclusive distributorship and Shital Innovative Foods in Mumbai."

Future Plans

While digital is their strong point, they have realised that the stakes are high in the offline world as far as spices are concerned, since the average ticket size is small compared to other online categories. She shares, "Next year we will be focusing on expanding our reach in Mumbai and Pune and simultaneously entering into new geographies like Gujarat, Chennai etc. We are also looking at growth strategies in exploring exports next year."

Words of Wisdom for Aspiring Entrepreneurs

"An early-stage start-up's biggest advantage is that they are closer to their customers' sentiments, and that is the only voice that matters. Please listen to your customers and make the changes accordingly. Speed is everything. Don't chase perfection; rather, chase speed and keep adding value along the way."



GOBBLE UP

V M W R A W P L I N D T F C D U V C
E I E B N D T O B L E R O N E B U X
E Q S T M N X B R G C A D B U R Y C
J N E S T L E Q U X X G O D I V A A
M A R S X A C A N T H O N B E R G I
G H I R A R D E L L I S R M K Z R L
Z C R X H E R S H E Y S F A I F V L
D R I T T E R S P O R T L A M L U E
T F E R R E R O R O C H E R S U K R
V L M W G U Y L I A N Q E Z A B L A
D F S U O U U D S M X K U S J W O T
F P B X F V A L R H O N A Z X P U X

CHOCOLATE BRANDS

AMUL
ANTHON BERG
CADBURY
CAILLER

GODIVA
GUYLIAN
HERSHEY'S
LINDT

NESTLE
RITTER SPORT
TOBLERONE
VALRHONA

FERRERO ROCHER
GHIRARDELLI
MARS
MILKA



ROASTED STRAWBERRIES PANCAKE

INGREDIENTS

Strawberries 500 gm, quartered
Sugar 1/2 cup + 5 tsp
Flour 1 cup
Baking powder 1 tsp
Buttermilk 1 1/2 cups
Egg 1 beaten
Butter 4 tbsp melted

METHOD

1. On a foil-lined baking sheet, toss berries and 1/2 cup sugar; cook at 425° F until bubbly, for 10-12 minutes.
2. In a bowl, whisk flour, baking powder, and soda, the remaining 5 tsp. sugar and 1/2 tsp. salt.
3. Stir in buttermilk, egg, and 3 tbsp butter.
4. Brush a non-stick pan with remaining butter; heat over medium-low.
5. Ladle batter onto the pan.
6. Cook, turning once, until golden, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Top with strawberries.



RASPBERRY RICOTTA CAKE

INGREDIENTS

Nonstick vegetable oil spray
All-purpose flour 1½ cups
Sugar 1 cup
Baking powder 2 teaspoons
Kosher salt ¾ tsp
Eggs 3 large
Ricotta 1½ cups
Vanilla extract ½ tsp
Unsalted butter, ½ cup melted
Frozen raspberries or blackberries, 1 cup divided

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 350° F. Line a 9"-diameter cake pan with parchment paper and lightly coat with nonstick spray. Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl.
2. Whisk eggs, ricotta, and vanilla in a medium bowl until smooth; fold into dry ingredients just until blended.
3. Then fold in butter, followed by ¾ cup raspberries, taking care not to crush berries. Scrape batter into prepared pan and scatter remaining ¼ cup raspberries over top.
4. Bake the cake until golden brown and a tester inserted into the center comes out clean, it'll take about 50–60 minutes. Let cool at least 20 minutes before unmolding.



TOMATO CROSTINI

INGREDIENTS

Tomatoes 500 gm cored, halved, seeded, chopped into 1-inch-thick slices
Garlic cloves 3 (2 minced, 1 halved)
Sea salt to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
Extra-virgin olive 3 tbsp, plus more for drizzling
Red wine vinegar 1 tbsp
Baguette 1 loaf cut diagonally into 1/3' pieces
Fresh basil leaves 1/4 cup, coarsely chopped

METHOD

1. Combine tomatoes and minced garlic in a large bowl. Season generously with salt and pepper.
2. Add 3 tbsp oil and vinegar; toss to mix well. Cover and let tomatoes marinate at room temperature, stirring occasionally, for 2–3 hours to allow flavors to develop.
3. Toast the bread and rub one side with cut garlic clove; drizzle bread with oil.
4. Add basil to tomato mixture in a bowl and toss well. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
5. Arrange crostini on a platter. Spoon some tomato mixture on top of each crostini.



BEET AND FETA PASTA

INGREDIENTS

Pasta 500g
Feta cheese 200g
Fresh dill/herbs 20g, finely chopped
Lemon juice 1 tbsp
Extra olive oil, for drizzling

For the sauce
Cooked beetroot, drained 600g
Olive oil 100 ml
Salt 1 tsp
Garlic 4 cloves, finely chopped
Red chilli 1 large (with or without seeds)

METHOD

1. Cook the pasta following the instructions on the packet.
2. Meanwhile, put the beetroot into a blender and add the olive oil, salt, garlic, and chilli. Blend to a smooth paste.
3. Crumble the feta cheese into a bowl, add the chopped dill, then drizzle over the lemon juice and mix.
4. Once the pasta is cooked to your liking, drain and put back into the pan. Pour in all that beautiful beetroot sauce and mix through. Tip out on to a serving dish and sprinkle over all the feta and dill mixture.
5. Drizzle with a little extra olive oil for good measure before serving. Drizzle with a little extra olive oil for good measure before serving.

'Stressed spelled backward is 'Desserts'

- Loretta LaRoche

Even Sherlock Holmes could not have come up with a better observation!

Let's face it, things have been quite tense this past year, and stress has been our constant companion through the doom and gloom that the year was synonymous with. One of the most interesting things to happen during the pandemic and the ensuing lockdown was how most of us ended up finding ourselves in the kitchen – taking our culinary hobbies to the next level. It was akin to rediscovering a passion, which honestly was the only ray of hope in 2020. The year did not only see the rise of a pandemic but also the genesis of a newfound appreciation for food!

Our brand-new segment - Foodism Recommends, evolved out of our team's cumulative love for all things food. Here, we will endeavour to bring to your notice some of the most trendsetting books, shows, and movies, on food that have caught our attention, fancy, and of course, appetites.

So, without further ado, let's take a look at our inaugural recommendation...

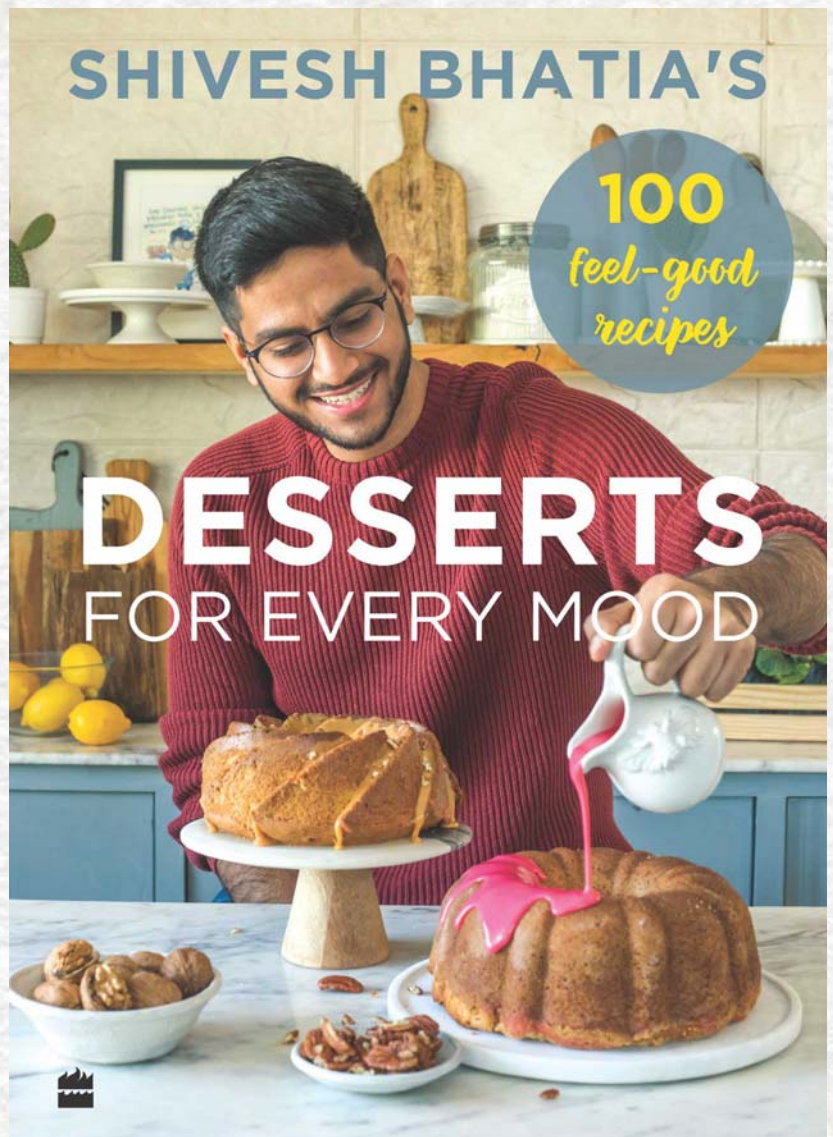
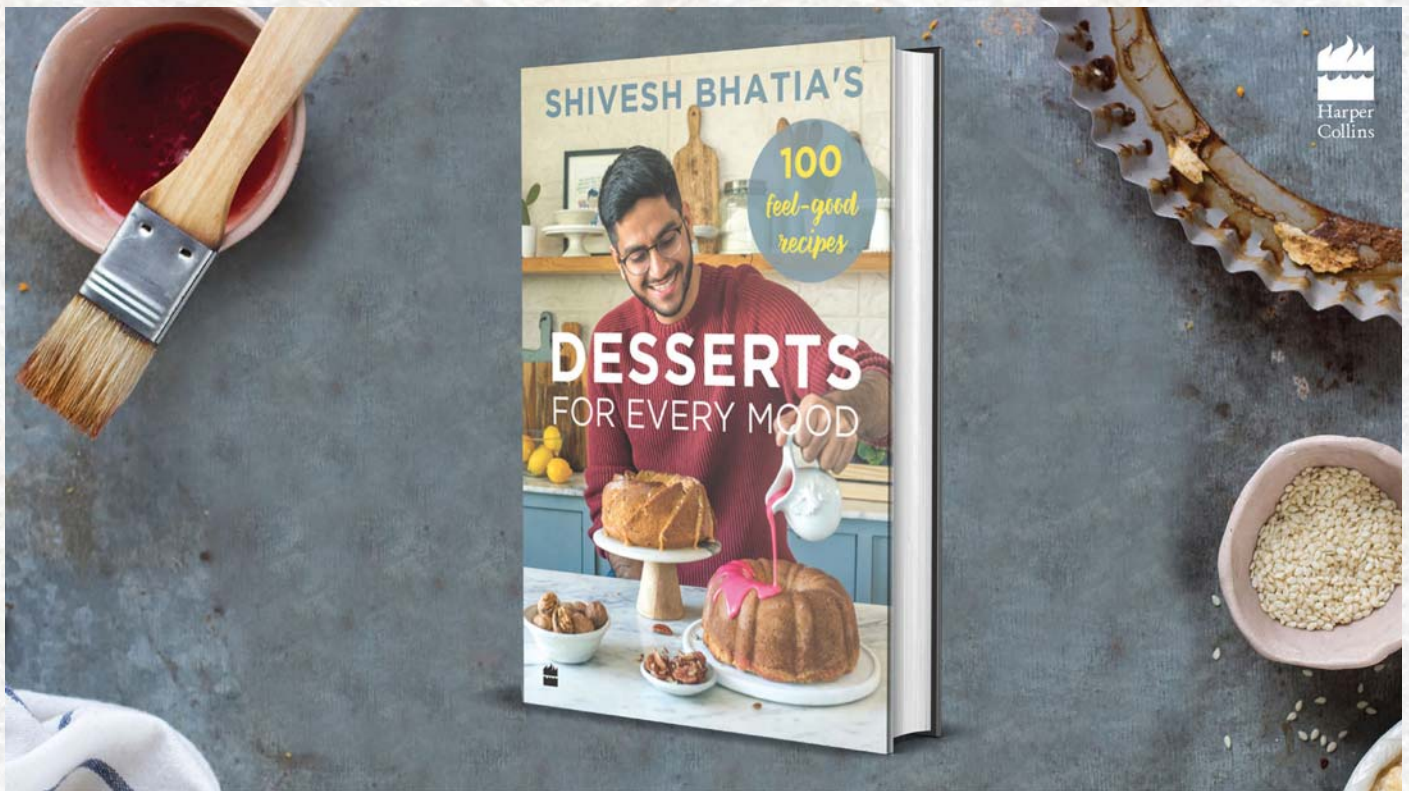


Image Source: Google & Harper Collins



Many of us tried our hands at making bread, baking desserts, or whipping up a 'Dalgona' and showcasing our experiments on Instagram this lockdown. Amidst the sea of food content that inundated our feeds, one of our constant inspirations on the social-sphere was our very own wonder-boy and baker extraordinaire - Shivesh Bhatia. Barely in need of any introduction, this young self-taught baker rose to prominence with his blog 'Bake With Shivesh' and, at the tender age of 24, is already the author of two cookbooks with a massive 200k+ followers on his social.

A quick look at his feed @shivesh17 and blog 'Bake With Shivesh' is enough to send you down the rabbit hole into a cornucopia of desserts, and we can guarantee you that the sheer aesthetics will tantalize your sweet tooth and leave you drooling. Following his first book's success, Shivesh has come up with a 100-recipes pleaser with 'Desserts for Every Mood,' and as the title notes, it is a repository of recipes that you could bake any time.

From cakes to pies, cookies to muffins, this 263 paged cookbook even has a segment for just frostings and fillings. Aimed at catering to a beginner and a seasoned baker alike, we are quite sure that there literally is a dessert for every mood waiting to be baked in it.

'Desserts for Every Mood' by Shivesh Bhatia

With easy-to-follow steps and measuring guides, there's a guarantee of foolproof recipes that will make you feel like a master baker in no time. Our personal favourites include the 'Chocolate Tart with Vanilla Custard and Raspberries,' 'Berliners,' 'Lemon Poppy Seed Cupcakes,' 'Smore Cookies,' honestly, we were spoilt for choice, after a massive binge-week!

Apart from the flawless styling, photography, and the sheer variety that this labour of love includes - for a lot of people who are vegan or vegetarian or don't like eggs in general, you'd be delighted to find that maximum recipes from the book are eggless, with a few gluten-free ones in the mix as well.

Shivesh encourages his readers to truly immerse themselves in the process of baking a recipe from the book - to enjoy the colours, textures, smells, touch, and taste of each dessert. We would call this sage advice - and just as he puts it, baking a dessert is enough to soothe all your stresses and woes away and usher in an immense sense of peace and calm as your kitchen fills up with the aromas of warmth and love.

So, go ahead and order yourself a copy off Amazon, and as you bite into your fresh-out-of-the-oven Brookies, you will thank your stars that you paid heed to our recommendation.

A WORK OF HE(ART)

Reethika Singh is a triple threat - a food blogger, stylist and photographer with a heavy packing Saveur Blog Award win for best photography under her belt. One look at her Insta feed [@cupcakeree](#) and you are struck by her eye for composition and how vibrant all her creations are. Here's taking a brief look at this digital star's journey.



I always rely on my gut instincts. Even if I am inspired by a certain photo, I try to incorporate elements based on my choice. I like to focus on the food first and accessorize with props and/or ingredients accordingly. I love to play with vibrant colours and that is evident in my food photos.”

Reethika Singh
Bengaluru



“There is no sincere love than the love for food.”

George Bernard Shaw

For a photographer, life is all about capturing the little details and seizing the very essence of it with a camera. While the wonderful gadget has the capacity to capture things that our eye can't see – it's the eye behind the camera that forms a perspective and completes a picture.

Her Journey

Reethika Singh's culinary journey started a long time ago but it went through a lot of transformations down the years. She learnt the art of understanding visual aesthetics in college while pursuing a degree in art and journalism. In the initial years, She started her professional journey as a graphic designer. Baking gave her happiness which is why she also started a cloud kitchen and made beautiful custom order bakery items. She has been a foodie all her life so gravitating towards food on an intrinsic level came naturally to her. She started taking a keen interest in culinary arts right from her adolescence. Dabbling in the food blogging and photography domain happened due to some unforeseen circumstances. "I had no plans of becoming a food blogger or photographer, but when chronic health issues forced me to shut down my baking business, I took to Facebook and Instagram to share my culinary creations.", she explains.

"I began to dabble in food photography and fell in love with it. Instagram exposed me to a whole new world of food photography. I was inspired by the work of other food bloggers. I too wanted to make my food look as good as it tasted. Photographing food became a means for creative fulfilment. It gave me the opportunity to get creative with colour, composition and light."

Adding Value to Food

Her uniqueness lies in the fact that she wants the food to shine. Other artificial enhancements take a back seat. If the food isn't appealing then no prop or light will elevate the dish. It comes down to the authenticity of the ingredients and how well they complement each other.

The fact that she has had her own food business and loves cooking, adds an innate depth to her visuals. The devil is in the details and she experiments with the dishes to know all about the core ingredients and the chemistry between them. She quips, "The process usually starts with an idea for a recipe. I note down my thoughts and when I get the chance, I go about testing the recipe. If I am

satisfied with the result, I go ahead and plan the shot. I shoot intuitively and generally don't stick to any rules whilst composing my shot. I just let my eyes guide me and try to keep the food as the focus of my shot."

Savouring the Win at Saveur

The stalwarts in the food photography domain and their ingenious work have inspired her the most and she got to be a part of the prestigious clique when she won the 2019 Saveur Blog Awards in the photography category and the fact that she is the first Indian food blogger to do so, is nothing short of a dream come true.

She borrowed a DSLR camera from a friend and learnt professional photography online. She still feels that she has a long way to go and her family and friends support her unconditionally. She reveals, "To be honest, I never expected to get nominated, let alone win. I was in two minds to attend the awards ceremony, but I am glad my family talked me into it. It was such a surreal moment when I saw my name flash on the big screen. I felt so many emotions at once... shock, disbelief, joy, gratitude and pride to have my work recognized on an international scale."

The Beautiful World of Photography

She feels like she is still in the nascent stage of food photography and has a lot to learn from the industry. She understands the aesthetic value of food and believes that food has to appeal to all the senses otherwise it loses its charm. She explains, "I don't know much about other photography genres, but food, is a still subject, and one doesn't have to deal with a lot of movement. There are several genres of food photography such as commercial, advertising, editorial, lifestyle etc."

She adds, "We eat with our eyes first and the main aim of any kind of food photography is to increase the visual appeal of food. We want to tempt the viewers and make them hungry. In editorial food photography, the styling, composition, colours, props and lighting need to be in order before placing the hero dish in the shot. It requires a certain synergy (especially whilst working alone) because food has a short shoot life."

#1 Tip for All Aspiring Food Stylists and Photographers

“Create from a place of passion without worrying too much about technicalities and your photos will always have soul. Hone your craft with practice.”



BEET, BANANA AND BERRY SMOOTHIE

INGREDIENTS

Beetroot, steamed, peeled and cubed 1 medium-sized
Frozen banana 1 large
Mixed fresh/frozen berries 1/2 cup
Rolled oats 1/4 cup
Chia seeds 2 tsp
Yoghurt 1 cup
Date 1 soft, pitted
Pure vanilla extract 1/2 tsp
Dash of **cinnamon**

METHOD

1. Combine all the ingredients in a high-powered blender and blend until completely smooth.
2. Pour into a tall glass and enjoy!



©Cupcakery.com



CHOCOLATE PUDDING POPSICLES

INGREDIENTS

Sweet potato, boiled and
mashed 1 1/4 cup
Cocoa powder 1/4 cup
Thick coconut milk 1/2 cup
Thin almond milk 3/4 cup
Ground cinnamon 1/2 tsp
Pure vanilla 2 tsp
Dates (large and soft) pitted 6
Pinch of salt

METHOD

1. Blend all the ingredients together in a high-powered blender, scraping down the sides a few times in between, until you end up with a very smooth, pudding-like mixture.
2. Spoon it into popsicle moulds, freeze until set and enjoy.



Lotte Choco Pie

Rich cocoa pie

It is past midnight. You've been binge-watching a ten-season series for quite some time now, and suddenly, you hear your stomach rumble. You avoid going to the kitchen for almost an hour, but you're famished. You are craving something sweet, so you open the refrigerator to find some snacks. You forage around the shelves for something nice when your eyes land on a single pack of Lotte Choco Pie. You've hit jackpot!

As kids, we've all quarrelled for that last piece of Choco pie. Some eat the outer layer first and savour the marshmallow-y goodness at the very end. Some freeze it, crush it, and put the pie crumble on ice cream to add an extra crunch to the dessert. Whilst there are some who go the conventional way and have it as a dessert sandwich.

For many of us, Lotte Choco Pie was, is and always will be the most enigmatic bite-sized chocolate marshmallow cake/pie that is readily available at home. These saccharine treats are so good, that most of us end up wolfing down 2-3 pies back-to-back because one, of course, is never enough.

Lotte's rich cocoa variant is an excellent upgrade to the regular chocolate pie. The sumptuous, dark chocolate

flavour of the outer soft biscuit shell is decadent and goes well with the sweet and chewy marshmallow layer. This snack is perfect for gifting purposes as it comes in different boxes consisting of 2/4/6/12/18 individual pieces. For dark chocolate lovers – this variant is a match made in heaven.

What's Inside

Each box contains an individual pie pack – pillowy marshmallow fluff sandwiched between two soft biscuits, dipped in smooth dark chocolate with a white chocolate drizzle on top.

Packaging

The Lotte Choco Pie boxes come in different colours as per their flavour profile. The original flavour comes in a lavishly crimson-red box.

This particular flavour comes in a dark brown box.

Variants

The two most popular flavours available in the Indian-subcontinent are Lotte Choco Pie Original and Rich Cocoa. There do, however, exist many flavours in the International market like Green Tea, Choco Chip, Cheese, Strawberry, etc.



FOOD, AESTHETICS AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN



Bijal Jobanputra - Mumbai

Opportunities come and go, but very rarely do you come across a chance that acts as a powerful catalyst and drastically changes the path of your life. Bijal Jobanputra [@foodstylistbijal](https://www.instagram.com/foodstylistbijal) is a living, breathing example of how fate can sometimes have other plans for you.

Her Journey

Just like her family of accomplished doctors, Bijal had set out on a journey of becoming a nutritionist as she was always drawn towards food. She liked her job a lot, but an enlightening seminar on food photography stirred something deep within her. It invoked a passion for food styling and aesthetics she didn't know she had. She shares, "Here was a platform where my creativity and my knowledge could be amalgamated, and I could see the magic unravel right in front of my eyes."

Her First Break

Things aren't always rosy when you pivot into a career that doesn't stick to the status quo, but her fearless attitude has led her to where she is. "The seminar on food and photography left a deep impact on me, and as the saying goes, 'What you seek is seeking you,' similarly, my destiny took me to where I am today. An old acquaintance suggested I meet the guru of Indian Food Styling, Mr. Nitin Tandon. One meeting with him was all it took for me to take that plunge into the unknown," she quips. "It's been four years since I got into food styling, and no two days are similar, but I love every bit of it. Catching glimpses of your creations on a billboard, TVC, or the shelf of a supermarket makes it worth it."

Her Role as a Food Stylist

Styling has become an integral part of all creative fields. With social media platforms promoting crème de la crème of the lot, the focus is on making things look aesthetically pleasing. This, is when food styling comes into the picture; she explains, “Essentially, a food stylist is a make-up artist - for food. We use various techniques to ensure the food looks great. The role doesn't end here; we have to bring alive thoughts and ideas depending on what the ad agency or the client has visualized how their shot should look.”

Her Learnings

She has learnt a lot in these four years, and all the assignments helped her hone her skills to perfection. She explains, “One's understanding of food plays an important role here along with a sense of design and creativity. In India, food styling is still in its nascent stage. There are no formal food styling courses available. Hands-on learning on the job helps a lot.”



She faced a lot of challenges in the beginning, but her mentor guided her patiently. She reminisces, “Being a vegetarian has its limitations, add to this having no culinary background - these were the initial hiccups I had to overcome. With time I started understanding the chemistry and physical appearance of food. One needs to be passionate about food holistically to understand different segments like pairing, flavours, or how food reacts to various temperatures, to name a few.”

The food styling and photography field is very dynamic, and a lot goes into the planning and execution of the shoots. "Yes, a lot of planning is required to execute an effortless and seamless shoot. Right from storyboarding the creatives, props indent, sourcing the material, backgrounds, to the type of food to be shot, brand colours, mood, to the application, following the brief, and having a unified communication with the agency and the client before even the shoot begins, is what keeps the ship afloat."

An Assignment She is Proud of

She has had the privilege of working with the best of the best in the food industry, and picking just one assignment would be challenging. However, what comes to her mind explicitly is a TVC shoot involving Sankranti in India, which is celebrated differently in each region. "I didn't have a brief before going into the shoot, which is very unusual. It was just a matter of starting the shoot, the synergy amongst the team was brilliant, and the project was executed to perfection even though we were working nonstop for three days."

Another incident that has left a mark on her mind is when her team executed nine stop motions videos in 3 days. Creating art and designs with spices and food materials was the highlight of the shoot. "We were all meeting for the first time, and by the end of the shoot, we became great friends and remain so."





The Do's and Don't of Food Styling

Don'ts

- 1.** You are not a single player here. Collaborate and teamwork will take you places.
- 2.** Never get attached to your work (this one is tough)
- 3.** Understand the limitations of food as it has a short shelf life, so things need to be planned and prepared accordingly.
- 4.** Get messy but not dirty. There's a thin line between these two, and the understanding comes with practice.
- 5.** Don't overdo your shots or over-think. You should know when to stop.



Do's

- 1.** Do your homework, referencing, and be prepared for anything that might crop up at the last minute.
- 2.** Understand what the client expects out of you.
- 3.** The devil is in the detail, don't miss a thing; the camera catches everything.
- 4.** Food styling is not just about plating; it's about creating the entire environment and experience. It should be about eating with your eyes and making things look - tempting.
- 5.** Be a resourceful shopper. You have to be aware of what to find and where.

Your #1 Tip for Aspiring Food Stylists

Practice, practice, and practice some more.' This, is a simple yet most effective mantra.



CREATED WITH LOVE

Rujuta Sahani, Jersey, Channel Islands, UK

Rujuta Sahani's classy visuals and her contemporary style of playing with contrasting colours will surely dazzle your mind. Check out her work on Instagram by the handle **@thyme.n.vine**

The lockdown was an interesting time for many aspiring home chefs and bakers who wanted to start something at home and be their own agency of work. Rujuta Sahani, a UK based food blogger and food photographer, made the most of this buffer period and decided to creatively represent her love for good food through her Instagram page **@thyme.n.vine**

Her Connection with Food

Indians love eating and the way we express our love for friends and family is through food. We've grown up with our mothers over-feeding us out of love and affection. The concept of 'bas ek aur roti' is so reminiscent of our childhood that the best way to describe a mother's love is that and so much more. Rujuta's connection



with food started in her childhood. Her mom has been her biggest inspiration and shaped her perspective on food immensely. She explains, "Growing up, I noticed how creative my mother was when it came to cooking up different dishes and maintaining her own recipe book. This is how my love for food just grew stronger."

Life isn't easy when you have different hats to wear and it's your passion and determination that make or break your path of

self-discovery. Rujuta has a lot on her plate but she manages her life with ease and enthusiasm. She explains, "Some do get surprised when I say I have a full-time job, a doting husband, two adorable kids and a hobby that helps me take my mother's passion for cooking one step forward. I tend to cook for my blog over the weekend with my husband's job of keeping kids busy, so I can cook and capture the essence of the food before the hungry family devours it."

Her Journey

She started her blogging journey during the lockdown because she had some time for herself for the first time in her life. The fact that there were no restaurants open, also added to the cause. She reveals, "During the lockdown, I started taking photos of the food I cooked with my phone and slowly graduated to using a proper camera. My focus has always been to cook a nutritious and delightful plate of food for the family, keeping it simple, but making the best use of fresh produce, especially, fruits and vegetables."

Her food styling and photography skills are a mix of modern and traditional aesthetics. She credits her mother for being an innovative chef and paving the way for her hobby. She quips, "My mother has a great knack of recycling leftover foods. Hence, anyone who can bring innovative culinary skills to the table in a sustainable way is an absolute inspiration to me."

Her Go-To Recipes

She loves pairing healthy soups with loaves of freshly baked bread, which is easy to make and packs a mighty punch. As a family, they all enjoy a lot of street food items and breakfast recipes as well. She elaborates, "My go-to comfort recipes have to be quick and easy ones for the weekdays - my family and I love soups and lentils.

They are super easy to cook and have so much nutrition. I combine this with home-baked nut/seed encrusted bread to make sure the number of antioxidants get tucked in as well! I love dark chocolate and fruits, and many desserts or breakfast recipes on my blog tend to incorporate them."

Some Tips for Our Readers

1. It is quite easy to get stuck in the numbers game and compare oneself with other bloggers' following. This may turn out to be a very negative aspect and may hold your creativity down.
2. Stay true to yourself and if your objective is to produce a delicious plate of food with aesthetic photographs, then don't let anything else distract you. Success will follow you in some shape or form.
3. More importantly, do what you love. Doing it because that is what everyone is doing, won't get you anywhere.
4. Enjoy this process on a daily basis. You can't be too uptight about it or it will all crumble one day.

She loves baking as it involves following the recipe to the T. You also need a lot of patience to master the art of baking. "Baking is what I enjoy the most. Puddings, desserts, bread are very tricky to master and that is where the challenge is. That is precisely why I like it a lot."

Food, Photography and Everything in Between

Rujuta is a self-taught photographer and has improved her skills by keenly observing the industry experts. She is blessed with an innate aesthetic sense that helps a lot when it comes to her creations. She gushes, "Food composition is something that comes naturally

to me and I have got a good eye for creativity. When I compare my body of work with that of a lot of commercial food magazines and food bloggers, it helps me draw comfort from the fact that I am on the right track. Photography is a simple yet complicated art, something I would surely like to master with time. I am still learning some of the basics of photography and there's a long way to go."

She believes in tapping in on the intrinsic value of the recipes. The more natural they look, the more decadent the appeal of the food is. The narrative also makes a huge difference. She states, "For me, storytelling is key and photos are a fantastic way of telling an interesting story. I use very rustic and organic undertones (sometimes messy as well) that are very close to everyday cooking representative of a busy household; closely followed by the right kind of attention given to the "hero/superstar" of my story."

BEETROOT OATS PANCAKES

INGREDIENTS

Rolled oats, crushed 1 ½ cups

Beetroot 3 medium sized
(cooked)

Baking powder 2 tsp

Pinch of **salt**

Milk 1/2 cup

Honey 2 tbsp

Oil 2 tsp

Eggs 2

Vanilla extract 1/2 tsp

Butter for greasing the pan

For Topping (Optional)

Fresh Berries

Edible flowers



METHOD

1. Mix the dry ingredients - flour, baking powder and salt together.
2. Blend beetroot and milk to get a smooth puree.
3. Add in honey, oil, vanilla extract, lightly beaten eggs and mix well.
4. Combine the dry & wet ingredients with a whisker making sure there are no lumps.
5. Use little butter just enough to grease a non-stick pan and cook the pancakes on low heat to retain the red colour.
6. Stack the pancakes in the oven at the lowest setting to keep them warm until you are ready to serve.



CHOCOLATE CHIA PUDDING WITH CHERRY COMPOTE AND COCONUT YOGHURT

INGREDIENTS

Chia seeds 1/2 cup
Cocoa powder 2 tbsp
Pinch of **salt**
Vanilla Extract 1/2 tsp
Honey 1/4 cup
Plant based milk 2 cups
Cherries 200g pitted and chopped
Sugar 1 tbsp
Water 1 cup

Optional toppings
Plain Greek/coconut yoghurt
Fresh fruits of choice
Dark chocolate curls
Chopped nuts





METHOD

- 1.** Add pitted chopped cherries, sugar and water in a saucepan; bring it to a simmer and cook for about 2 minutes until cherries have softened and formed a thick sauce.
- 2.** Let it cool and keep it aside. This compote can also be blended if you like smooth consistency.
- 3.** Blend together chia seeds, cocoa powder, salt, vanilla, honey and begin to whisk in milk a little at a time until cocoa powder and chia seeds are well blended.
- 4.** Store in the fridge for 2 hours or overnight until the pudding has thickened.
- 5.** Whisk again before dividing the pudding into the bowls.
- 6.** Layer up the cocoa chia seed layer with some cherry compote and coconut yoghurt.
- 7.** Top up with some fresh berries, cocoa nibs or chopped nuts of your choice.

WHEN YOUR LIFE REVOLVES AROUND FOOD

Kirthi Anand, a Bangalore based food stylist and blogger, who now lives in Chandigarh, loves to play with the food composition to elevate the aesthetics. Follow her journey on **@allthingsgourmet** to fall in love with her food photography.



Kirthi Anand, Bangalore Chandigarh

Her Journey

Kirthi has always been a huge gourmand for as long as she can remember. Both her grandmothers are exceptional cooks and she got inspired by their delicious recipes that got passed on to her eventually. She loved watching food-based shows and movies as an adolescent which is why cooking came naturally to her. She shares, "I love hosting get-togethers at home and whip up

a variety of dishes for my friends and family! During the pandemic, my best friend suggested that I start blogging since I had a lot of time on my hands and I enjoyed cooking and documenting my kitchen experiments immensely! I started as a recipe blogger but noticed that I received more appreciation for my styling and photography! So I focus more on those areas now."

For the Love of Food

She loves trying out different kinds of cuisines from around the world but finding interesting restaurants that cater to such varied cuisines can be a challenge. This has been a key factor in motivating her to experiment in the kitchen. Her go-to recipes include some dishes from her homeland-Kerala and some popular dishes from Thailand. She gushes, "I love demolishing a piping hot bowl of Kadala Curry or stew with some soft and pillowy Appam/Puttu. I also can't stop gorging on Pad Thai, Green Curry and Khao Soi as they are super comforting and pack a zesty, spicy punch."

She loves recreating recipes that are simple but delicious. She shares, "My mantra is to

cook recipes that are healthy and guilt-free but don't compromise on flavours. I love making stir-fries, pasta and desserts as they are healthy yet delicious."

The Repercussion of the Pandemic

The pandemic brought with a lot of complicated challenges. It had a significant effect on our food consumption. Strengthening immunity became one of the primary goals. She explains, "In order to improve immunity, I started consuming more vitamin C in the form of citrus fruits and also reduced my carbohydrate intake since activity levels were relatively low. I think the pandemic and lockdown period made us very aware of many new cooking methods and

recipes since we were mostly cooking at home and seldom eating out."

It is All in the Presentation

Presentation is key to any kind of food styling and photography. You eat with your eyes first. Her initial focus was on recipes but gradually she understood the importance of styling and aesthetics. She elaborates, "I pay a lot of attention to the presentation of the dish as I think it's imperative for food to be visually appealing. Working with complimenting colours is essential as that's the first thing people notice. I do not use too many props and like to keep the focus on the dish. Edible flowers and herbs add vibrancy to the overall presentation and brighten it drastically."

Tips for Our Readers

1. If you are an amateur cook, always start by cooking something you love to eat. Make sure you use cutlery that is classy and elegant.
2. Make sure all your ingredients are ready and prepared before you start cooking, making your work super easy.
3. Be open to different cuisines as sometimes we end up liking dishes we never thought we would.
4. Enjoy the process of cooking as much as you enjoy eating. Turn on some music, keep a tidy counter-top and you're all set for a million-dollar meal right at your home.



EASY CORNFLAKES COOKIES

INGREDIENT

Butter ½ cup room temperature
Brown sugar ½ cup
Caster sugar ¼ cup
Vanilla extract 1 tsp
Egg 1 large
Plain flour 1 ½ cups
Baking soda ½ tsp
Chocolate chips ½ cup
Cornflakes 1 ½ cups

METHOD

1. Line two baking trays with baking or parchment paper. Preheat oven to 180 C
2. In a large mixing bowl, beat butter and sugars using an electric beater for 1-2 minutes or until it turns pale and creamy.
3. Add vanilla and egg and beat until combined. Sift in flour and baking soda and mix to combine.
4. Add chocolate chips and stir. In a separate bowl, add Cornflakes and crush them slightly using your hands.
5. Scoop balls of dough (roughly 1.5 tablespoons each) and then roll them in the Cornflakes, pressing the Cornflakes into the cookie dough using your hands.
6. Place cookie dough balls onto your prepared trays, leaving room for the cookies to spread out.
7. Bake for approximately 12-13 minutes or until golden brown.
8. Carefully transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.



HIBISCUS, MINT AND CITRUS ICED TEA

INGREDIENT

Fresh Red Hibiscus flowers 4 - 5 or
Hibiscus tea
Mint Tea or **fresh mint leaves** 1/2 tsp
Mild tea leaves 1/2 tsp
Honey or Agave to taste
Juice of 2 lemons
Choice of cut or
Frozen fruits

METHOD

1. Steep the hibiscus petals and mint tea in warm water (not hot) for 15 to 20 mins.
2. Make sure you discard the stalk and the center portion of the flower before steeping.
3. In another cup steep your tea in hot water.
4. Now in a jug strain and add the hibiscus water and tea.
5. Squeeze lemon, add honey and serve over ice.
6. Add fresh fruits to infuse more flavours.

RELISHING AND CAPTURING HOME COOKED DELICACIES



Vartika Dwivedi, Hyderabad

Being an avid foodie, Vartika endorses healthy cooking and prefers home-cooked food over outside food. Being a vegetarian, she puts in a lot of efforts to make recipes relatable and straightforward for her audience. Her culinary expertise ranges from Indian, Italian, Asian to Mediterranean cuisines, and she chronicles her recipes on her Instagram page [@relish_food_gallery](#).

Her Association with Food

Vartika Dwivedi is based out of Hyderabad and previously worked with a reputed MNC as an HR associate. "I have always been an avid foodie and am always on the lookout to find out newer avenues of trying out diverse dishes from all walks of life, with one limitation – I am a vegetarian and hence, seek vegetarian options wherever I go," says Vartika.

As a street food lover, she has tried to inculcate those cooking techniques in her daily cooking to make food even tastier. This is also a consideration for good health as commercial food has a high content of butter, oil, and spices that are not always good for our bodies.

She further shares, "My husband loves food as much as I do, so he keeps on requesting for exquisite dishes. Owing to this, I gradually started adding a diverse list of recipes to my everyday cooking. On my food journey, I inculcated many different cooking techniques to enrich the taste of my food."

Her Blogging Journey

Vartika gives credit to her mother and her husband, who motivated her to embark on the blogging journey. They were quite impressed with her cooking and presentation skills and encouraged her to showcase it on social media platforms to increase social outreach.

"As I was quite interested in food photography, Instagram was a natural option for me to showcase my talents. While the presentation is an essential aspect of food photography, my core focus remains on the food being prepared and using fresh ingredients, natural spices, no artificial colours, and the underlying cooking techniques," shares Vartika.

She prefers sticking to basic cooking techniques, perfected over the years, but time and again, she keeps adding little twists to elevate the taste of her dishes. Since she is a vegetarian, she tries to cover a wide variety of regional cuisines in her cooking – North Indian, South Indian, few delicacies from India's eastern and western states, Pan Asian, fusion and Italian.

Her most recent experimentation includes baking, which is quite complicated and is a game of

precision, practice, and patience she feels.

Her Cooking Inspirations

Since she has been living away from her hometown for quite some time now, she regularly discusses many recipes with her mother and mother-in-law on a video call. She continuously takes their feedback and inputs on how to improve her cooking.

While the presentation is an essential aspect of food photography, my core focus remains on the food being prepared and using fresh ingredients, natural spices, no artificial colours, and the underlying cooking techniques."

"Naturally, both are my source of inspiration and my go-to people whenever in doubt. Besides, I have been following many renowned professional and home chefs like Tarla Dalal, Nisha Madhulika and Chef Bhupi for learning helpful tips, tricks, and important steps to improve my culinary skills" she shares.

Her Go-to Comfort Recipe and Her Favourite Food

"My all-time favourite comfort food is Vegetable Penne Alfredo Pasta. It's loaded with cheese, stir-fried vegetables and has a rich, creamy texture

due to Béchamel sauce. It is a delicious and easy recipe and does not require a lot of ingredients." She shares.

Besides this, she regularly indulges in preparing Italian Pasta Recipes – One-pan pasta, Spaghetti Aglio e olio, Stir-fried vegetable pasta (with an Asian twist), Basil pesto pasta etc. According to her, most of the pasta dishes are heavy in carbs and have a generous amount of cheese, so they're the epitome of comfort food for her.

Her Strengths and Skills to Master in the Future

"I consider my ability to adapt to different cooking styles as one of my greatest strengths. Due to this, I can cook recipes ranging from Indian, Asian, Italian to Mediterranean. As we transcend geographical boundaries, cooking methods vary greatly and call for instant improvisation and adaptation to get similar results in our tropical weather." She enthusiastically replies.

In terms of techniques she wants to master in the future - baking stands at the top of her list. So far, her experiences have taught her that baking requires utmost precision – be it ingredients, temperature, utensils etc. Whilst there are quite a few baked goods that she can prepare, she still believes it's a learning process.

One of her biggest concerns while baking is identifying alternatives for eggs. Of course, this presents an added challenge, since due to it, many variables end up changing – ranging from ingredients to temperature, to oven settings. Currently, she is cataloguing

what proportions and settings work and which don't. She hopes that soon she will have a working formula in place.

What Makes Her Account Different?

"I prefer to present recipes which are relatively easy to make, with lesser steps in cooking and can be incorporated easily by a wide variety of audience. Another point where my account stands out is that I try to cook my recipes with the minimum possible amount of oil and spices so that they are healthy while also retaining their signature taste." She candidly shares.

Apart from this, she generally promotes home cooking. Even when she collaborates with different products, she usually incorporates them into her recipes to showcase how easily these products can elevate home-cooked dishes. Coming to her content from a presentation point of view, she usually publishes her photographs with minimal to no editing, and most of her pictures are captured outdoors in natural daylight in a home garden setup. This provides an authentic connection to nature and makes her photographs pleasing to the eyes while adding freshness.

The Food She Enjoys Cooking

"Any recipe which is simple to cook and has a unique taste is something I'm naturally drawn to. Also, recipes inculcating seasonal produce and regional delicacies are also varieties I enjoy cooking." She shares sincerely.

Styling Her Food Pictures

"When I started my account, my initial content was more focused on food photography, background blur, focus etc. But over the next few months, I researched a lot on the internet and slowly started including elements like colour matching utensils and crockery, backdrops, camera angle, outdoor and indoor light management etc. which helped me in elevating my food photographs to the next level." She shares.

Off late she has also started publishing flat layouts, and portrait mode capture with matching backgrounds. The next goal she aims to achieve in her journey is dark food photography and is vigorously researching methods and techniques to achieve the same.

Some Tips for Our Readers

1. "My sincere advice to all our readers is to try and eat as much home-cooked food as possible. I have only 1 cheat day in a week, whereas I only eat home-cooked food on all the other days. Whichever dish you are craving for, please try to prepare at home. This way, you can easily control how healthy your food is and also how spicy you want it to be." She advises.
2. Commercial food laden with spices and fats can be quite detrimental for gut health, although they are pleasing to our taste buds. She advises to include probiotics and alkaline foods in your diet to counter the effects of spicy and oily food and drink a fair amount of water throughout the day. Additionally, we need to include as many fresh and seasonal ingredients in our food to get the most amount of taste and nutrition out of it.
3. Her advice to our readers is, "Every once in a while, do try diverse street foods so that you never get bored and keep getting enough ideas that will aid you in experimenting in your day-to-day home cooking."



PEAS PULAO

INGREDIENTS

Fresh seasonal peas ½ cup
Long grain rice or basmati rice (soaked for 30 minutes)
1 cup
Cumin seeds 1 tsp
Black cardamom
1 to 2 pieces
Star anise 1 piece
Bay leaves 2
Cloves 2 - 3
Black peppercorns 5 - 6
Cinnamon stick 1
Cashew nuts 8 - 10
Warm water 3 cups

METHOD

1. Take a large pan and heat 2 tbsp desi ghee. Add the whole spices and
2. cumin seeds and wait till the cumin seeds splutter.
3. Add fresh peas and keep sauteing till the water dries off and the peas are a little soft.
4. Drain the water from the rice and add it to the pan. Mix well and lightly roast the rice.
5. Now add 3 cups of warm water to the pan and add salt to taste.
6. Cover the pan with a lid and let the rice cook for 8 – 10 minutes on medium heat or till the water dries out.
7. Serve with Dal Fry or any vegetable gravy of your choice.





CREAM CHEESE RED VELVET CAKE

INGREDIENTS

CAKE BASE

All-purpose flour (sifted) 1 ½ cups
Cocoa powder 1 ½ tbsp
Baking soda ¼ tsp
Baking powder 1 tsp
Castor sugar 1 cup
Softened butter ½ cup + 2 tbsp
Vinegar 1 tsp
Vanilla extract 2 tsp
Red gel food colour 2 tsp
Buttermilk 1 cup

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

Cream cheese 200 grams
Whipping cream 1 cup
Powdered sugar 2 tbsp

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C. Line an 8 inch round cake pan with parchment paper and grease the pan and the parchment paper with vegetable oil.
2. Take a large mixing bowl and add all-purpose flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, baking powder and mix.
3. In a separate bowl, mix sugar and butter and beat together well.
4. Add buttermilk, vanilla extract, red food colouring, vinegar, and mix well until everything is combined.
5. Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients in three batches, alternating with buttermilk and keep mixing lightly.
6. Be careful not to overmix. Fold only to a point where everything is well combined, and there are no large flour pockets or lumps.
7. Transfer the batter into the greased pan and bake for 30 – 40 minutes or until a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. Your eggless red velvet cake is ready.

FOR THE FROSTING

1. Take a mixing bowl and beat the whipping cream till stiff peaks are formed
 In another mixing bowl, mix cream cheese and powdered sugar and beat into a creamy texture.
2. Add the cream cheese mixture to the whipping cream and then gently fold with a spatula to a sufficiently firm texture.



BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

1. Cut the cake into two even-sized discs. Cut off the rough edges and uneven top surface and crumble them into a fine powder to be used later for decoration.
2. Put the first disc on a turning table and apply some cream to the base to avoid base movement. Apply some sugar syrup to the cake base and then spread the cream cheese frosting.
3. Now place the second disc on top and again apply the sugar syrup. Cover the second top with cream cheese frosting. Now use a palette knife and spread the cream cheese frosting on top and around the cake. Use a scraper to even out the edges and give a smooth finishing.
4. Decorate the cake with a sprinkle of the cake crumble all around.
5. Take some cream cheese frosting in a piping bag with a nozzle of your choice. Decorate the cake with the desired design.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Cooking is an art. But what is art without the aesthetics, right? We don't just eat with our mouth; we eat with our eyes as well. So making food look good and capturing its essence in the right way is the real challenge. Dubai-based aspiring food stylist and photographer, Sabna Asharaf knows how to create beautiful imagery with her food and elevate the dish's spirit. Follow her Instagram handle [@sabnaashraf](#) to know more.



Sabna Asharaf, Dubai UAE

Her Journey

An IT professional by occupation, she shifted to Dubai in 2007 and worked at different organisations for a couple of years. Things changed when she got married and that is when she finally took out some time for herself and focused on doing things that were close to her heart. Cooking being one of them, she started experimenting in the kitchen and gave particular importance to plating and styling the food.

She explains, "Exploring food was something that came naturally to me and gave me a lot of happiness. Dubai is a food heaven for gourmands, and I could take full advantage of this opportunity and try various cuisines and dishes in the city."

She started making new recipes that weren't the usual run-of-the-mill variety. Her husband played a huge role in helping her embrace her inner creativity. Initially, she just wanted to chronicle her kitchen trials and note down new recipes. Eventually, her family and friends showed a keen interest in her experiments and that is how she started blogging "My family had a huge part in encouraging me and that is how I ventured into styling and photography." She shares.

"My journey started when I started clicking pictures of my baked items and desserts. Surfing through the internet and social media platforms inspired me to improvise the dishes. I also started using a DSLR camera for better quality images. Reading more about food photography and styling online helped me a lot." She adds.

Her Inspirations

Her Nani has inspired her the most, apart from her husband, family and friends. She always taught her one thing, "When someone eats the food we cook, our objective should be to fill their hearts along with their stomach, you will lose the soul of cooking if you only think of the stomach." She faced many challenges in the process, but her family and friends showered her with positive feedback and love. That is how she improved her skills and overcame the hurdles.

Her Go-to Dishes

She loves cooking all kinds of Indian dishes as they remind her

of her home. But what makes her swoon is her love for all things sweet. She loves baking, and the fact that her family can't get enough of it, keeps her going. "I believe cooking is a journey that can take you to a place where you find happiness. My objective has always been enjoying the journey more than the destination. Adding a little love to your food drastically changes the dish's outcome."

The Power of Storytelling

Every dish she has made has a story to tell, and that is the exact approach of her blog. She also believes in quality over quantity. "I have always tried to relate my posts with a special occasion or an event or present it employing a story. Regardless of age, everyone loves to read or listen to stories, making everyone happy, and I love to share happiness through my account."

Essential Styling Tips

Styling is an essential element and can make or mar the overall outcome of a dish.

Here are some tips on styling by Sabna that will surely help you in your life.

1. Appealing props and cutlery make the dish stand out immediately.
2. Pay attention to how fresh the dish looks.
3. Use suitable backdrops that highlight the dish aptly.
4. Play with contrasting colours in the frame.
5. Try a minimalistic approach to the elements in the frame without crowding it too much.
6. Try various types of compositions, to style the dish.

Tips for Our Readers

1. Find out why you want to do food blogging. Having an objective is very important.
2. Passion and patience play a key role.
3. Enjoy the whole process and do it with full commitment.
4. Try to find a domain or a segment which is complementary to your style. Follow your heart and never give up.
5. Be open to suggestions and constructive criticism, it will help you improve.
6. Learn from experts and update yourself regularly by making use of technology & literature.
7. Try to envisage your final output, while you prepare your dish and frame.
8. Celebrate your achievements and appreciate yourself.
9. Support from your family & friends is critical.



VANILLA PUDDING SHOTS WITH ARROWROOT POWDER

INGREDIENTS

Milk 1 cup
Sugar 1/3 cup
Arrowroot powder 2tbsp
Thick cream 100ml
Vanilla essence 2 tsp

METHOD

1. Mix the arrow root powder with 3 tbsp of milk.
2. Add the remaining milk, cream, and sugar into a pan.
3. Pour the arrowroot-milk mix to the pan.
4. Let it cook until the mixture

becomes thick, use a whisk to stir.
5. Add vanilla essence and pour into the moulds.
6. Let it sit for 1 hour in the refrigerator. Unmould and serve.



RED VELVET COOKIES

INGREDIENTS

All-purpose flour

1 ½ cups

Cocoa powder 4tbsp

Baking soda 1tsp

Salt a pinch

Egg 1

Brown sugar 1/2 cup

White sugar 1/4 cup

Milk 2 tbsp

Butter 1/2 cup

Vanilla essence 1tsp

Chocolate chips

(white/black) 1/2 cup

Red food colour 2 drops

METHOD

1. Mix flour, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt.
2. Beat butter, then add both white and brown sugar and beat again. Add egg, vanilla essence and milk.
3. Add the dry ingredients to the mix and whisk well.
4. Mix the red food colour and chocolate chips.
5. Make the dough. Keep it refrigerated overnight.
6. Make small balls from the dough and place them spaced apart on a baking tray lined with parchment paper
7. Bake for 15 minutes at 180 degrees. Let the cookies cool down on a wiring rack, then serve.



WITH LOVE, FROM GERMANY

Whilst 2020 was a year that most would like to forget, it also brought with it some great opportunities for people to try out hobbies that had been sidelined. When ordering food became too risky, restaurants began to shut down and to cook at home became the new normal - this was precisely when many of us started going back to our roots for unique recipes our mothers and grandmothers made for us with so much love.

Sushma **@homechefs_journal** from Germany has a similar experience to share.



Sushma Dabbiru, Germany

Her Journey

Life for this software engineer was pretty much cut out the usual way. Work, family, and life in Germany took most of her hours, and there was no time left for any hobbies or vocations that pleased her mind and calmed her soul. She was used to cooking authentic Indian food at home but didn't think of documenting it in any form. Things changed when the world got hit by the pandemic. She found herself with a lot of time to spare. She decided to start a blog of her own where she would chronicle all her kitchen experiments and weave a story around the origins of a recipe in her family and why that particular dish meant so much to her.

Her bond with food started in her childhood. Her grandmother and her mom are the reason why she began recreating recipes from back home. She explains, "I have lots of fond memories related to food from my childhood. My mother is a great cook as all mothers are and inherited her cooking skills from my grandmother, a marvellous cook and prepared some unique dishes when I was a kid. We visited our grandparents a lot during school vacations. She would spoil us rotten with some exquisite foods and pick the ingredients from her home garden. She is a strict vegetarian, yet used to prepare some lip-smacking non-vegetarian dishes without even tasting them - her pickles, in particular, were to die for!"

The Challenges

All of us revere our mother's cooking, and Sushma was in absolute awe of how well her grandmother and mother cooked. The real challenge arose when she had to do justice to those ingenuous recipes and document them through photography. "Replicating the undocumented recipes of my grandmother was a great challenge for me, especially after moving to Germany," she elaborates. "Normally, I would call my mother to enquire about the recipe and try to recreate those beautiful old memories associated with the dish. I rarely entered the kitchen when I was in India and didn't have hands-on experience of preparing Indian delicacies, mainly the street food, which I felt very deprived of."

All these experiments helped her gain confidence, and she started dabbling in cuisines from around the world. Her focus was to keep the basics intact while adding a touch of creativity.

She still wants to up her photography skills and feels that she has a long way to go. She quips, "I want to focus and learn more about food photography, as a food blogger, a well-captured picture is the only way to

communicate how delicious a dish is. I would love to work on Baking with my German neighbours' help, and I want to perfect my grandma's pickle recipes. I would also

Tips for Our Readers

1. It's essential to have a lot of patience in food blogging. Things may not work the way we want them to, and the best way to deal with it is to have faith in your skills and practice.
2. It's essential not to quit and take inspiration from fellow bloggers during tough times.
3. Try to be unique and form your own style.
4. Do not expect immediate results in the beginning. These things take time to build, and there are no shortcuts to developing a skill.
5. Limit your screen time by taking creative breaks as health and family time has the highest priority.

like to learn about artificial light photography and editing, as the location I stay in doesn't have consistent lighting conditions."

Her Favourite Dishes

Having tried many unique recipes from all over the world, she loves to recreate some of the most popular

recipes from India's Southern region as that is where she hails from. "Although I enjoy eating all types of Indian dishes, my comfort is a bowl of sambar, rice and potato fry.

Also, I like guilt-free desserts, and I am a big fan of Indian chats and street food."

What Makes Her Blog Unique

What makes her blog unique is that she uses locally sourced Indian ingredients to make some delectable dishes while giving her unique twist to the tale. Her recipes are also extremely healthy, and she substitutes processed goods with organic ingredients to make them guilt-free. She loves using fresh herbs as they add a pop of colour to all kinds of dishes.

She believes Indian cuisine is rather tricky to style. A lot of the elements look similar, so highlighting the ingredients smartly is essential. She elaborates, "Curries are something which I find difficult to style since most curries look similar. I feel it's important to highlight the elements used in it. For example, in my mushroom curry, I make sure the different textures of mushrooms are captured. I also focus on the garnish as it helps in elevating the dish exponentially."



BRINJAL BESAN STIR-FRY

INGREDIENTS

Brinjal 1 big
Chickpea flour 3 tbsp
Onion 1 big
Ginger 1 small root
Green chillies 1 large

METHOD

1. Roast 2-3 tbsp of chickpea flour on a low flame till it slightly changes its colour.
2. To the hot oil, add cumin seeds, thinly sliced onions, finely chopped ginger, chopped green chillies.
3. Fry until onions turn translucent.
4. Add chopped brinjal, turmeric, salt, red chilli powder. Cook until the brinjal is done.
5. Now add roasted chickpea flour and mix everything well.
6. Cook further for 2 – 3 mins, splash some water if it's sticking to the base.
7. Once it seems dry, take it off the flame. Garnish with some roasted peanuts.





CRUMB BARS

INGREDIENTS

Oats 1 cup
Flour 1 cup
Brown sugar ½ cup
Pinch of salt
Melted butter ½ cup
Vanilla
Desiccated coconut
Any kind of Jam

METHOD

1. Mix together oats, flour, desiccated coconut, sugar, salt, vanilla.
2. Add melted butter to form crumb like texture.
 Add half of the crumb mixture into the baking dish.
3. Spread any kind of jam evenly on top of the crumb mixture.

4. Sprinkle the remaining mixture on top of the jam and press the it slightly to set.
5. Bake this for 20 – 30 mins. Let it cool then cut into squares and enjoy.

THE KITCHEN ESCAPADES OF A BANKER



Rashmi Vaishnav, Mumbai

A professional banker who followed her love for cooking during the lockdown Rashmi Vaishnav's Instagram account **@kasoor_e_methi** is as interesting as its name and is filled with artistic clicks and drool-worthy recipes.

Her Journey

A banker by profession who works for an MNC bank in Mumbai, Rashmi's tryst with cooking dates back to her teenage years, where she got to experiment with different kinds of food. "Growing up in a household full of gastronomes, cooking was an activity full of fun and frolic with everyone's avid participation." She fondly recalls.

"Most of my cooking skills were inherited from my mother, who is undoubtedly the best culinary specialist I know."

Her experiments in the kitchen paid to curate some signature dishes, which became her forte over the years and was appreciated by her friends and family members. The opportunity to move out of home for further studies and a job gave her plenty of reasons to experiment with new recipes and improve her culinary skills.

"A typical weekend for me is spent hosting family and friends over some on-demand dishes clubbed with laughter and drinks," shares Rashmi. Cooking for her is not just a passion that she pursues, but also something that has been extremely therapeutic for her.

Her Blogging Journey

"Blogging was always on my bucket list, but a full-time job, travelling to and fro to work clubbed with other household errands always acted as inhibitors," says Rashmi. The pandemic came with its own set of woes, but the lockdown also provided a lot of spare time post-work. Hence she thought that there could not be a better opportunity to pursue her passion thus began her blogging journey in 2020.

"With a lot of support and encouragement from my family and friends, I took this leap of faith and put my favourite spice to life in the form of 'kasoor - e - methi'." quips Rashmi. She explains, "There is not a lot of thought which goes into cooking. The idea hence, is to focus on the process and express your culinary creativity in the form of a sumptuous dish which should be finger-licking good. Of course, all the drooling, glee and eventual words of appreciation from the consumers act as an additional motivation."

Her Cooking Inspirations

Her mother's cooking has been a huge influence and inspiration for her. Growing up, watching her mother cook and learning the nitty-gritty of getting the perfect mix of ingredients, slow cooking, the proportion of spices and the duration that a dish has to be cooked, was imbibed.

"The minute details and recipes handed down by our home-cooks have so much depth, variety, and character, that they've had a massive influence on my cooking," she states. She also resorts to the

recipes of master chefs like Sanjeev Kapoor, Kunal Kapoor, Tarla Dalal and many more when she has to cook an unconventional dish.

What is Your Go-to Comfort Recipe and What Do You Indulge in?

Her definition of a comfort recipe would be a conventional Indian curry that is essentially a concoction of mandatory Indian spices cooked in heritage style that go well with all forms of veggies or meat and can be a component of daily Indian platters. "I would generally club it with rice or paranthas paired with sides such as salad, pickles and a dessert. I can declare myself as more of a "Parantha with Paneer" over "Pasta in white sauce" kinda person," she declares.

"The minute details and recipes handed down by our home-cooks have so much depth, variety, and character, that they've had a massive influence on my cooking."

Her Strengths and Skills to Master in the Future

"My biggest strength has been my curiosity to learn and my will to experiment with recipes," she replies with excitement.

Blending cuisines and trying to get the perfect taste is what she aspires to achieve and puts her heart and soul into whatever she does. "I would love to learn and explore the

nuances of professional food photography as one of the fortes of my blog is "food styling" and I think the right skill sets, when blended with a professional camera, would get the desired results. As of now, I am pretty satisfied with the kind of content I have been uploading and want to keep learning continuously to evolve as a cook and a blogger," she states

What Makes Her Account Different?

"Right from the blog's name to the recipes I post, my audience can relate to it as most of them are conventional and the basic recipes are presented aesthetically," she says. A perfect pictorial representation of a dish is one of the key attractions for any visitor and hence it is a major focus area for her. As for the presentation, she explores her creative side and comes up with some unique themes. Her account is a reflection of recipes that are flavourful for the palate and aesthetically pleasing to the eyes as well.

She prefers making things from scratch - right from the hand-blended spices to sauces which accentuate the taste. "Nothing but a humble attempt to put my ideas to life and have fun while I do so. As they say "Happiness is only real when shared", she shares enthusiastically.

The Kind of Food She Enjoys Cooking

"I love to cook all kinds of food and it would be difficult to cherry pick what I enjoy and what I don't - but if I had to choose, authentic Indian recipes top the chart as they come naturally to me. I try to

maintain a fair balance by preparing conventional recipes and mixing it with regional dishes like gatte ki sabzi, chole masala, dal makhani, litti chokha, street food like pav bhaji, kachori or desserts like a variety of Indian sweets or cakes," she describes cheerily.

Styling Her Food Pictures

"My food styling largely depends on the dish that I cook. From a dish point of view, everything needs

customization right from the serveware to ingredients and technique. From a picture point of view, subject, composition and lighting are of utmost importance," she adds.

An authentic Indian dish would be styled in a traditional thali whereas a cake would have a theme of flowers to it. She reveres colours and hence you will always see a blast of colours in her food pictures. Be that in the food itself or the

elements that she uses by serveware or garnishing.

"Garnishing is the most important aspect when it comes to food styling as it is the one which does most of the talking in the photograph which would go on the blog. Hence a proper spread of herbs, seasoning and the style in which you would chop them can make a significant difference." Rashmi advises.



Some Tips for Our Readers

Rashmi shares a few handy tips that everyone can use are:

1. If you do not have a professional camera, it is best to shoot in natural light. You may do it near a window. This is a tried and tested tip as I use it too.
2. Set up your table first & then set up the dish for the photoshoot. The colour of the background and serveware should complement the dish that is being presented. In a nutshell, food should be the USP.
3. Cook the dish in such a way that the actual colour & texture makes it appealing without the need for filters.
4. Try and make the post relatable for your audience. It could be anything that is significant such as a reason to celebrate a festival or any occasion or anecdote that adds to the speciality of the dish.
5. She ends the interview with a message for our readers, "As they say, "Cooking is love made visible" and as a recipe has no soul of its own, it longs for your heart and soul.

So, whatever you cook, just enjoy the process while you continue to learn. And also - Anybody can Cook."



SHAHI TOAST

INGREDIENTS

Milk 1 liter
Sugar 250 gm
Dry fruits and saffron to garnish
Elaichi powder
6-7 bread slices
Sugar syrup

METHOD

1. Simmer milk on low flame for about an hour & half with sugar and elaichi powder to make rabdi. Cool it.
2. Cut the edges of the bread slices and cut them in desired shape.
3. Fry these slices in ghee until they turn golden brown.
4. Let them cool & then soak in sugar syrup for 1-2 min. Take it out and serve with Rabdi over it.
5. Garnish with chopped pistachios and saffron.



BUTTERFLY PEA AND JASMINE FLOWER RICE WITH STIR FRIED VEGGIES

INGREDIENTS

Rice 1/4 cup

Butterfly pea flowers

10 to 12 (dried or fresh)

Jasmine flowers 5-6

Chopped veggies of your choice

Garlic 3 - 4 cloves

chopped

Ginger 1 tsp chopped

Oil 2 tsp

Lemon juice 1 tsp

Salt to taste

Pepper powder a pinch

Red chili flakes a pinch

METHOD

1. Boil 1 cup of water with blue pea flowers for about 8-10 mins.

2. Strain the infused water and add rice. Add salt and cook on medium flame for around 5-7 minutes.

3. Take jasmine flowers in a thin cotton cloth and let it infuse its flavour in the rice while it's getting cooked.

4. Take oil in a pan, add chopped ginger and garlic and sauté.

5. Add veggies of your choice and stir fry.

6. Add pepper powder, chili flakes, lemon juice and salt. and Serve.



So beloved is a Pizza that across countries and cultures attempts have been made to colonize it, and add to it local flavours that are better suited to native palates. Be it butter-chicken pizza in India, the Chicago deep dish in the USA or Zapiekanka in Poland - there's a slice for everyone!



THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT
PIZZA!

We have arrived at the month of love and of course one of the most obvious

associations with love, is our love for food. One of the most popular foods across the globe - Pizza is a phenomenon in itself and with this month hosting within it International Pizza Day - we figured that an ode to this masterful creation is necessary.

Across countries and cultures numerous attempts have been made to create pizza variants that are better suited to native palates. For example, in China, many people do not like cheese or are lactose intolerant, hence, the local pizzeria will serve pizza topped with soy sauce, corn, chicken, tuna and crab.

Such is the appeal of pizza that businesses are thriving on this Italian creation. Across the globe pizza chains like Pizza Hut, Domino's, and Little Caesar's have created an entire culture around pizza.

With pizza being around for a while now, let's trace back its roots of origin and see how it became so popular all around the globe.

The Origin Story

The inception of pizza is older than we think, with people putting toppings on breads for centuries now.

Since the time of ancient Etruscans, who lived in northern Italy between the 8th and 3rd century BC – focaccia was eaten, that was topped with cheese, garlic, onions and pork for the richer class.

Pinsa, a food created during the ancient Roman times, is the most similar dish to pizza. Pinsa dough uses wheat/soy/rice flour, more water and less salt than a pizza which makes for a lighter and airier crust.

The modern-day pizza was invented with the import of tomatoes to Europe from the Americas in the 16th century. Through word of mouth, the popularity of this delicious dish spread so much that the tourists crowded the poor districts of Naples to try the varieties of this dish developed there.

The Marinara pizza was one such variety that became famous in Naples. It was topped with tomatoes, garlic, oregano and extra virgin oil. It was named for the fishermen who fished in the Bay of Naples whose wives would prepare marinara pizza to eat when they returned home.

Another pizza that gained popularity in Italy is the Margherita pizza named after the name of Queen Margherita of Savoy. Raffaele Esposito, who worked in "Pizzeria di Pietro" invented Margherita pizza topped with basil leaves, mozzarella cheese and cherry tomatoes. Raffaele was called to bake several varieties for the King and Queen of Italy, King Umberto I and Queen Margherita of Savoy. The Queen loved this pizza and therefore it was named after her.

How America Became Second Home to Pizza?

Gennaro Lombardi opened the first pizzeria in Manhattan in 1905 and attracted not only the Italian immigrants but Americans too. In 1924 another pizzeria was established by Antonio 'Totonno' pero Totonno's in Coney Island of USA. People migrated from the east to the west after World War II. The migrant Italians migrated to large cities to set their bakeries to make flatbread and pizza. They faced hardships living the American dream but did not give up on their traditional food.

It was around 1943 that pizza gained popularity - after the victory of the Allies in World War II. The American marines who were posted in Southern Italy returned home with a new fad for pizza. By 1950 pizza became a staple food of most American families, and many parlours materialized selling variants on the American streets. For example, Chicago's deep-dish pizza, California pizza, New York-style pizza are all American pizzas, but different in their own rights.

During this time the pizza was not as popular in Italy as it was in America. Eventually, the craze wave for pizza hit Europe and other parts of Italy grew familiar to pizza and its taste.

Pizza's Indian Sojourn

In the mid 80's, Pizza came to India and was sold in bakeries and South Indian restaurants as a snack. The pizza had tomato sauce, onion, capsicum and grated cheese but due to its dryness Indians doused it in ketchup.

In the 90's Don Giovanni's was the only pizza delivery service in Kolkata and Nirula's in New Delhi was the only place to enjoy junk food like pizza, burgers, milkshake and sundaes. With Domino's coming to India in the early 2000s, this was when India actually came close to taste the authentic pizza followed by Pizza Hut.

What is the reason that Pizza has such a widespread appeal? Scientists say that it is because we as humans are drawn to foods that are fatty, rich, sweet and complex - the cheese is fatty, the toppings are rich and the sauce is sweet; when combined together it creates a complex flavour.

While culinary scientists may have an answer to the appeal of pizza - one thing we know for certain, no matter the type or toppings, just one slice is enough to excite our brains, thrill our taste buds and make us salivate. All hail the mighty Pizza!



1. Pizza chefs have their own lingo. For example, mushrooms are called screamers, pepperoni is referred to as flyers and a ball of dough that has been stretched and ready for toppings is called a skin.
2. The gooey layer between the base and the toppings is called the gum line.
3. In 2001, Pizza Hut delivered a salami pizza to the International Space Station, which was the first pizza delivered to outer space.
4. "Happy" pizza is cooked with Marijuana in Cambodia.
5. Eating pizza once a week reduces the risk of cancer due to the tomato sauce's high lycopene content.

Deep-dish pizza is like a round pie with a dense crust that is cut into squares. It was invented at Pizzeria Uno in Chicago in 1943 by its founder Ike Sewell. The difference between deep-dish pizza and any other pizza is its deep pie-like crust that is doused in sauces and toppings. This pizza has mounds of cheese, sausages, pepperoni as its toppings but its crust is thin and crisp. The crust of this pizza cooks for over 45 minutes and soaks the fats from the toppings and cheese, ensuring that the crust doesn't burn and gets a golden finish.

**CHICAGO'S
DEEP-DISH PIZZA**

New York-style pizza is a large slice of pizza made to suit the needs of on-the-move New Yorkers. A New York-style pizza crust is thicker and is baked for 15-20 minutes. The dough of this pizza has standard components like flour, water, yeast and salt, and has unusual components like sugar and oil. The sugar and oil help in getting an even browning while the dough is baked.



NEW YORK PIZZA

Manakish is an adaptation of pizza from Lebanon and is usually served as breakfast. Manakish is prepared with pizza dough and has za'atar as its topping which is made from thyme, oregano and sesame seeds. Sometimes cheese and meat are added to this dish as well.

This Provençal dish **Pissaladiere** from France is served as an appetizer or a light lunch and is made with caramelized onions, anchovies, olives and herbs.

PISSALADIERE

SFIHA

Sfiha is a flatbread also called Sfiḥah, Esfiha or Esfirra. This Middle Eastern dish is made in the shape of a round pizza and is filled with seasoned ground beef or mutton, Labneh - a Middle Eastern yoghurt cheese and sometimes vegetables.




Okonomiyaki is a Japanese dish topped with cabbage, Aonori (seaweed) Katsuobushi (fermented tuna) with savoury sauces like yam and kimchi.

OKONOMIYAKI



Sfincione pizza or Sicilian pizza comes from Sicily, Italy. It has a thick, spongy crust topped with bread crumbs, onions and caciocavallo- a dry, crumbly cheese. Its dough is prepared with high oil and water content, that is bound with yeast and flour to get a flavourful and fluffy crust.

SFINCIONE PIZZA



Zapiekanke is a baguette like pizza from Poland which looks like an open sandwich topped with cheese, mushrooms and drizzled with Polish ketchup. It may also have olives and feta cheese added to it as toppings.

ZAPIEKANKA



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Talks

Always eager to bring you food stories from across the nation - Foodism talks is a special segment that we curate via interactive live sessions on our social media platforms with renowned faces who love food as much as we do. Offering you a sneak – peek into their lives, our sessions give you an insight into their lifestyle and their relationship with food.

Unfolding food stories from various celebrities, we hosted Maharani Radikaraje Gaekwad of Baroda and TV's beloved face Sourabh Raaj Jain in the month of January. Here's taking a look at the tales and memories they had to share.



MAHARANI RADHIKARAJE GAEKWAD

Maharani Radhikaraje Gaekwad, a heritage conservationist and textile revivalist gave us an insight into Gaekwadi cuisine and articulated various stories from the royal kitchen of Baroda.

Upon asking about Gaekwadi cuisine, Maharani Radhiraje Gaekwad shared, "Gaekwadi cuisine is essentially a Maratha cuisine, but what makes Baroda Gaekwadi cuisine different is that it has flavours of Gujarat." She shared that a dish prepared in Kolhapur will be spicy, but the same dish prepared in Gujarat will have milder flavours because of the coconut milk used to prepare the dish.

"We have included a lot of Gujarati dishes in our daily diet taking into consideration our personal favourite recipes," she shared. Their table spread includes Gujarat's popular dishes like khaati dal, patanwelia, thepla and a mix of both Marathi and Gujarati cuisine.

"My mother belongs to the Sailana Gharana, and the family loves cooking," the Maharani shared. She also mentioned that her maternal grandfather's elder brother, Maharaja Digvijay Singh wrote an illustrious cookbook called "The Cooking Delights of the Maharajas."

"The food in Sailana is spicy, but when I got married and came to Baroda, I liked the food immediately, even though the flavours were very different. I tasted authentic Maratha food for the first time and instantly liked it due to its mild flavours," the Maharani reminisced.

The royal families also have an assimilation of different cultures as princesses of different gharanas were married into the families. "The late Maharani was the princess of Jodhpur who brought different recipes with her; one recipe is chicken ke putte. My late aunt-in-law was the Maharani Saheb of Dhar, who was a food-lover and an avid traveller. She used to bring different recipes from different places and give them a twist according to her preference."

"My mother-in-law bakes excellently and cooks continental food to perfection. She loves making salads and pasta." She shared enthusiastically

Talking about the taste of different dishes, she explains, "We also make traditional Maharashtrian dishes like pandhra rassa, tel kombadi, jhingya chya lonch (prawn pickle) and the taste of these dishes is unmatched. They are very different from what we eat outside as we use home-made masala."

They have a secret recipe for kaala masala, which is used to prepare the majority of Maharashtrian dishes. "My mother-in-law supervises the making of this masala, where the different spices are roasted

and ground separately and then mixed. Our kaala masala is less spicy, and we use Gujarati red chili, which gives it a distinct flavour, in comparison to Maharashtrian kaala masala, where they use black pepper. It is a versatile masala which can be used in any and every dish."

On asking about the cookbooks published during the reign of Maharaja Sayajirao, the Maharani replied, "Maharaja Sayajirao commissioned 25 cookbooks written by his kitchen in charge, and he documented everything. He hosted international guests like the King of England, Prince Edward, and more. He made sure that his international guests were served not only Indian food but also food according to their taste."

Maharaja Sayajirao commissioned one book, Stutshastra, based on food that had different volumes, and Pathshastra, which was based on desserts. "The recipes were written in Marathi with standardized measurements. Even the pronunciations of different dishes were transcribed into Marathi so that the person who is serving that particular dish knows the correct pronunciation while serving the dish to the guests," the Maharani explained.

"A lot of thought went into the compilation of these books where the minutest details are documented like what kind of cutlery, glasses, the layout of the table should be done according to the occasions, and it makes it easy for us to refer and set the table accordingly."

Sharing further about the kind of table spread they have when they host guests, she answered, "For formal evenings, there are two to three non-veg items, three veg items with one gravy dish of both the veg and non-veg items. There is one rice dish like masala baath, ras baath, two fried items which can be both veg and non-veg and a dry chutney like coconut or garlic chutney."

She further shared that her favourite cuisines are Chinese, Thai, Mughlai, and Indian.

She fervently participated in the food fire and shared that she loves a refreshing salad in summers. She also loves radish and looks forward to eating it during winters.

The live session was a euphoric journey through the looking glass into the kitchen of the royals as everything was explained elaborately and candidly by Maharani Radhikaraje Gaekwad.



Image Source: Google / 99images.com

SOURABH RAAJ JAIN

Sourabh Raaj Jain, a much-loved TV personality, is a known face in most Indian households for his brilliant depiction of Lord Krishna in Mahabharat. He shared his fitness routine and his love for food in Foodism talks; here are a few snippets of the exciting segment.

"Eating home-cooked food is the best thing I do. I consult a sports nutritionist- Krushmi Chheda, and try to stick to the diet plan given by her as much as I can," he told us.

On asking how he remains fit or maintains his physique, he replied, "I am required to look a certain way and have to workout depending on different projects." During the lockdown, he worked out in his home and told us that he doesn't do anything different.

"I am a foodie and have been making pizza with absolute finesse since my school days," the actor shared when questioned whether he would describe himself as a foodie or not. "My mother was a working professional, and when she didn't feel like cooking, she would tell me that I make pizza really well, and we should have pizza for dinner." The actor reminisced about cooking in his teenage years.

"Eating right shouldn't be a generalized statement as it differs from person to person and every body functions differently," says Sourabh and advised to exercise and

not be lazy and be content being a couch potato. He suggests going for a run or a walk outside, not only for the well-being of the body but the mind as well."

Sourabh goes by the mantra "A strong body means a stronger mind." and shares the same with his children. He exercises with them every day and believes that children learn from the elders and try to implement those learnings in their lives.

He enthusiastically played 'Food Fire' with our host and mentioned that he loves gajar ka halwa made by his mom. During winters, his mother prepares multiple batches of gajar ka halwa to be savoured by the entire family.

He also shared that he can eat pav bhaji anytime and believes that pav bhaji has a fair amount of nutritional value. It is a concoction of various healthy vegetables.

Meditating for mental well-being, he said, "I start my day with warm water, then meditate by closing my eyes and concentrating on breathing."

The live session concluded on the importance of enjoying outdoor activities, which play an essential role in an individual's physical and mental well-being.

A Deep Dive into

Made from the juice of freshly harvested grapes - Wine ends up becoming the beverage we all enjoy after undergoing fermentation. One type of wine which has become quite popular with Indian consumers over the years is red wine – so here's taking a look at this sanguine beauty and its types.



T H E W O R L D O F

Red Wine

Rubious Hues

Red wine gets its colour from the skin of the grape and is typically drained off the skins at the end of the alcoholic fermentation. Red wines are generally fermented at a higher temperature compared to white wines that ranges from 20°C to 32°C. The high temperature helps extract colour and tannin from the grape skin. Once the fermentation has finished this newly made wine is stored for a period of time in either stainless steel tanks or oak barrels prior to bottling.

The colour in red wine changes as it ages. It starts from ruby, changes to garnet and then to tawny and it becomes paler in intensity. The tannins can also become softer and smoother after time and tertiary characters like meat, prune, fig and wet leaves can develop in the wine. For an aged wine, deposits can form at the bottom of the bottle as they mature and, if a large amount of deposit has formed over time, the wine is decanted before it is served to leave these sediments behind.



Paired Perfection

When it comes to food and wine pairing, it is important to remember that people have different sensitivities to various aromas and flavours. The same level of acidity or bitterness, can affect one person more strongly than another. When you eat food your taste buds adapt so that the perception of the levels of salt, sugar, acid etc. in what you taste next can be changed. For example, some food such as chocolate or a creamy dish will coat one's palate that can impair the sense of taste. Likewise, orange juice consumed right after using toothpaste will be unpleasantly acidic.

Sweetness in food can make a dry wine seem less fruity and a good wine pairing suggestion for food with sugar in it is to pair it with a wine that has a higher level of sweetness than the dish. Acidity in food is a good thing when pairing it with wine because it can balance a wine that has high acidity and also enhances its fruitiness.

However, if the level of acidity in the wine is lower than the food, it can make the wine seem less fruity. When pairing acidic wines with fatty food it can provide a pleasant sensation of the acidic wine 'cutting through' the fat in the food and cleansing the palate. Salt is an important ingredient for food as it can enhance the flavour of even a boiled potato or rice which otherwise would have very little flavour. This helps when pairing it with wine, as it can make the wine seem fruitier and also soften the tannins in red wine.

A wide variety of grape varieties are used to make red wine, and sometimes a number of these are blended together too. A few common red grape varieties you'll come across are Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah/Shiraz and Tempranillo.

TYPES OF Grapes

Pinot Noir

Pinot Noir is a black grape variety that requires a cool climate to produce good quality grapes. As a wine, it is pale to medium in colour with high acidity and low to medium tannins. Most common flavours in a Pinot Noir are strawberry, cherry and raspberry. It is often matured in older or larger oak barrels that impart subtle aromas of smoke and cloves. Most Pinot Noirs are intended to be consumed young but there are some good examples that develop complex tertiary flavours like mushroom and forest floor in the bottle which can take several years.

Cabernet Sauvignon

Cabernet Sauvignon is a thick-skinned black grape that needs warm climate so it doesn't struggle to ripen. The grape contains high levels of flavour, colour and tannin which needs a long and warm growing season to ripen fully. That is one reason why it does really well in a few wine growing regions in India. A wine made from this grape will have a deep colour, high acidity, high tannins, will be dry with a medium to full body.

Most wines have pronounced flavours of black cherry, green pepper, blackcurrant and mint. Cabernet Sauvignon can be found as a single varietal, but in old world wine countries it is often blended with other varietals like Merlot.

Merlot

Merlot is a black grape variety that grows well in moderate and warm climates. A single varietal wine made from Merlot is usually dry with medium acidity and tannins. The flavours in a Merlot will vary according to ripeness. A just-ripe Merlot will produce flavours of red plum, strawberry

and green bell pepper while a riper Merlot will produce cooked flavours of black plum and blackberry. As mentioned earlier, Merlot is often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon and a Merlot dominated blend can be aged for an extended period of time where it develops notes of tobacco and dried fruit over time.

Syrah or Shiraz

Syrah/Shiraz is a thick skinned black grape variety that is relatively smaller in size. The grape produces a wine that has high levels of acidity and tannins with black-fruit flavours of blackberry and black cherry along with notes of herbs and black pepper. This is the signature style of Rhone in France where it is known as Syrah. The riper style of wine with flavours of cooked black fruits and liquorice is more common in warmer parts of Australia where it is famously known as Shiraz. The difference in name gives the consumer an idea of which style of wine has been made and what they can expect.

Tempranillo

Wines made from Tempranillo have medium levels of tannins and acidity with flavours of red cherry, strawberry, black plum and blackberry. It is a versatile black grape variety that makes a range of wines, from simple and fruity to complex and ripe. If the wine is age worthy, small proportions of other varietals are blended to increase the tannins and acidity. Traditionally, Tempranillo based wines are matured in small new oak barrels that impart flavours of smoke, vanilla and cedar. Some very good quality wines develop complex flavours of mushroom, dried fruit and leather in the bottle over time.



Indian Wine Offerings

India has become a top red wine producer over the years and have a few variants that could compete in the international market. The Fratelli Sette is a blend of Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon from the rocky and sandy soils of Akluj in Maharashtra. Sangiovese provides the wine with raspberry and vanilla notes while the Cabernet Sauvignon adds blackcurrant notes.

It is aged for 14 months in French oak barrels that imparts vanilla flavours and softens the tannins giving it a vibrant finish. The KRSMA Cabernet Sauvignon is the flagship wine of the brand with its vineyards in Hampi hills. It is fruit forward, with intense flavours of prunes, cloves and dark chocolate. It spends 12 months in French oak barrels and also ages exceptionally well in the bottle over the years.

The Reveilo Merlot is an excellent choice for takers who like a light to medium bodied wine. On the palate it is dry with medium acidity, well-structured tannins with flavours of red plum and cherry. Last but not the least is the La Reserve from Grover Zampa that is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz. It is full bodied with medium tannins and acidity and, flavours of chocolate, coffee beans and vanilla.



Vidit Mantri works with Tulleeho as a Wine Trainer. Tulleeho is India's largest approved program provider for WSET (Wine and Spirits Education Trust) courses and also runs wine appreciation workshops for corporates.

Will this month be sweet, savory or sour – let's find out!

ZODIAC FUN FOOD FORECAST

ARIES



Dear Arians, this month is all about your fiery love for red chillies and red wine! Red is your house colour, and February is the month of love!

Nothing says love like a scarlet glass of Shiraz with some spicy spaghetti. Don't you dare get drunk though, because chances are, you will spill some sass and wine on your partner and spoil the mood.

GEMINI



You hate mushy and lovey-dovey things, so why not do something normal, like going on a pani-puri date with your partner, watching a movie in bed, and maybe going to a soup kitchen and cooking for the needy and hungry.

Cooking at the 'langar' and serving your community! Perfect Valentine's, isn't it?

LEO



This month is all about bonding with your special someone - pizza. For a lot of us, pizza is bae. It doesn't bail on you, supports you emotionally, gives you happiness, and doesn't argue at all. In an ideal world, we would suggest you get married to pizza, but since that is not possible, how about a pizza party with your friends and family?

TAURUS



Red roses, balloons, candle-light dinner, and home-made ravioli for your special someone- that is how you dream of having a valentine's day. But that is far from reality, eh? Still, you will end up having delicious burgers with your friends because partner or no partner, your gang has your back and a pack of chips ready for a sleepover!

CANCER



Don't be sad because you are alone, be sad because you are alone with a samosa, and even a samosa has aloo, but you really haven't found your Shalu/Bhaalu yet! Well, we have a prediction - Samosa will play cupid in your life, and you will meet the love of your life at a 'chaat bhandaar.' Keep your eyes open and your 'jaljeera' handy.

VIRGO



You will be surprised by your significant other on Valentine's Day when he/she will take you on a yacht and cook a splendid dinner especially for you. You both will dance in the moonlight, sing sonnets of love and end the special day by finishing off a huge box of chocolate. If this isn't an ideal way of spending quality time together, we don't know what is!

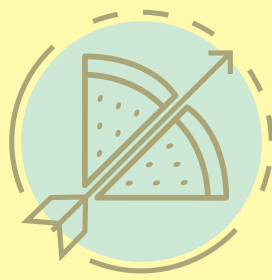
Will this month be sweet, savory or sour – let's find out!

LIBRA



Not all of your love is for a special someone. We know you have been missing 'Maa ke haath ke Rajma Chawal,' so the best way to spend your Valentine's Day is to meet your parents and chill at home like a boss. The irreplaceable 'aloo ke parathe makhhan maar ke,' and 'lassi' are waiting for you. Get an elegant 'Sari' for your mom and celebrate V-day the right way.

SAGITTARIUS



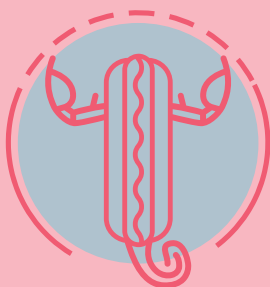
Dear Sagis, why are you so hopeless in love? You meet someone, fall in love, break up and then cry a river over a tub of chocolate ice cream? What you need is some good ol' cycling in the early morning hours, which will surely keep your spirits high and make you fitter. After all, taking care of your body is also a way of loving yourself, isn't it?

AQUARIUS



This month brings with it a huge task for you, impressing your would-be in-laws for the love of your life. So make the most of the month of love - shower your mother-in-law with some compliments and 'gajar ka halwa' and make some 'kadak chai' for your father-in-law. The way to someone's heart is through their stomach, after all.

SCORPIO



You fall in love as quickly as you fall out of it, which happens with partners and dishes alike. Last month it was paneer tikka, last week it was an Oreo milkshake, and this week it's a red velvet cake. The good thing, though, is that this month is all about love - so who knows, the guy/girl who sends you that red velvet cake may be your soulmate?

CAPRICORN



You will have a romantic Valentine's Day with a blind date and connect on your mutual love for mushrooms. You will finally find someone who enjoys Mushroom Chilly and Four Mushrooms risotto as much as you do. Who knows, you guys end up getting married and having a kid who is cute as a button (you see what we did there? Button - Mushrooms, no?)

PISCES



You will get a bouquet of roses and a jar of homemade rose-date marmalade on the special occasion of V-day. A secret admirer wants to make sure you pamper yourself well so he/she will shower you with your favourite food items and make you feel special. Just make sure you don't overindulge in these treats and feel bloated right before the special date.

**This is a fun writeup that our edit team has put together and must not be considered as authentic forecast. The content of this article is not targeted towards any profession or individual and is meant to be taken with a humorous pinch of salt.*



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