

Food Court



May it Please the Palate

NICK ROUMEL

Kacha Kela Nu Shak: Raw Banana Curry

(This week, Nick Roumel welcomes guest columnist Ashish Joshi.)



My father was born in and grew up in colonial East Africa. Growing up I listened to the tall tales that my grandfather told me about life in Africa in early fifties.

These tales grew taller still when I repeated them to my chums at school. The tales were all about my grandfather's supposed bravado in the African bush where he had to wrestle a lion or two early in the morning as he walked to his store to sell gramophone records. The magic potion that gave this Hindu Tarzan his superhuman strength and unflinching courage was the humble banana. According to my grandfather, African people were brave and strong because they ate Matoke—Uganda's national dish, which is made of raw bananas and spices, to which meat could be added if one so desired. Matoke and its rejuvenating powers were mentioned by the famed explorers John H. Speke during his search for the source of the Nile and Richard F. Burton during his explorations of Zanzibar. Burton called the humble banana "the staff of savage life" in African wilderness. Though there were no lions to be fought off on my way to school in India, I relished the Matoke that my grandmother made for us and sometimes took it to school in my lunch tiffin.

Fast forward a decade and I meet a wonderful woman in college who now is my wife, Payal. She too was a fan of raw banana dishes. Only in her case, being a Jain, raw bananas were a popular dish that her family ate during their fasting periods and festivals since green vegetables were to be avoided. As a Matoke lover, I did not need much persuasion to try out the Jain dish, Kacha Kela Nu Shak that Payal cooked, which when translated means, raw banana curry. The dish, while different from my grandmother's Matoke, was equally tasty.

The version below is neither an authentic Matoke nor meets the fastidious Jain standards (no ginger-garlic in Jain dishes). Nevertheless, it's one of my favorite vegetable dishes. You can eat it with hot chappatis or rotis (look for it in the frozen section at an Indian grocery store). Leftovers, if any, could be used up the next day by making a hash with an addition of chopped bacon, minced jalapenos, diced tomatoes, bell peppers, a dash of tabasco, and eggs. Follow this by an afternoon siesta, where you can dream about fighting off lions in the African bush.

Kacha Kela Nu Shak

Ingredients

2-3 green raw banana, peeled and diced into bite-size pieces
3-4 tablespoons oil
3-4 curry leaves
1/2 teaspoon cumin seeds
1/2 teaspoon mustard seeds
1 tablespoons coriander powder
1/4 teaspoon turmeric powder
1/2 teaspoon cayenne / red chili powder
1/2 teaspoon raw mango powder
1 teaspoon ginger, minced
1 teaspoon garlic, minced
salt, to taste
1 green chili seeded and cut length wise
2 tablespoons cilantro, finely chopped
1 slice of lemon wedge

Method

Heat the oil in a frying pan over medium high heat. Once the oil is hot, add cumin and mustard seeds to the oil. After the seeds crack, add curry leaves, ginger-garlic mince and green chili and stir for a minute. Lower the heat to medium.

Add bananas, salt, and masala powders. Mix well and stir fry for 4-5 minutes to make sure that the banana pieces are uniformly coated with the spices.

Add about 1/4 cup of water (or stock), cover the pan and cook until the bananas are done. They should be soft enough to eat but not mushy. To garnish, add fresh cilantro.

Serve the dish hot with a wedge of lemon and a side of chappatis or rotis.

Ashish Joshi is the owner and managing partner of Joshi: Attorneys & Counselors. He serves as the lead counsel in high-stakes, complex family law and divorce cases including cases involving severe parental alienation. He has counseled and/or represented clients in state and federal courts across the United States and internationally. Joshi serves as a senior editor of Litigation, the flagship journal of the ABA's Section of Litigation.