

# Appetite for Knowledge



## CURIOUS ABOUT CURRY?

The word 'curry' is a broad term and has several different meanings so it can get confusing! You can buy curry leaves, which are an essential component of South Indian cooking. Curry may refer to a spice blend mixture called 'curry powder.' In addition to being a blend of spices, curry paste also includes oils and fresh ingredients such as ginger and garlic. Curry may refer to the stewed dish 'curry' cooked across many cultures and parts of the world. The dish called curry usually includes the spice mixture curry, or those spices used to make up the mixture in a flavorful sauce with meat and vegetables.

### TAKE IT OR LEAF IT

Curry leaves are an herb cultivated from the curry leaf tree and are largely used in South Indian cuisine. The leaves are glossy green and have a powerful aroma. The flavor is bitter and sweet at the same time, almost citrusy. There are many ways to cook with curry leaves, but they are often used in a similar fashion to bay leaves, though they are often first fried in oil to release their flavor. You can find curry leaves at Indian and Asian food markets. They are best purchased fresh or frozen, but also available dried. Curry leaves are not a substitute for curry powder.

### BRITISH ORIGINS

Curry powder is not something you will likely find in India. During the mid-17th century, members of the British East India Company became familiar with the term kari, when trading spices with Indian merchants. The mix became popular in Great Britain, where they started selling a pre-ground mix dubbed "curry powder." Curry powder is a combination of various spices. It can range from five ingredients to more than 10. The specific blend of spices can vary widely from culture to culture and cook to cook.



FEBRUARY 1, 2018

## CURRY PASTES

Curry can come in the form of a paste, usually sold in a sealed jar or can. These tend to be comprised of fresh ingredients such as lemongrass, ginger, galangal, chiles, and/or herbs that are ground together to make a thick puree. Pastes are often used in Southeast Asian curries, where they'll be sizzled with oil to bring out their aromatic qualities before being thinned with a liquid like coconut milk to create a sauce or soup base. I like the fact that store-bought curry pastes are packed with flavorful ingredients that tend to be harder to find outside of Asian supermarkets.

To create a curry sauce out of a paste, all you need to do is add liquid. Normally a combination of chicken or vegetable stock and coconut milk are used in Thai curries, whereas Indian curries may call for cream, sour cream, yogurt, or milk in addition to stock.

## NUTRITION

Because of the many different fresh and dried spices it contains, curry can be extremely good for you. Turmeric, cumin, and coriander are the three main ingredients of most curries.

## INDIAN AND THAI CURRY

There are an endless number of different recipes for curry or curry sauce, so perhaps the best way to narrow this broad topic down is by cuisine. Two major categories of curry are Indian and Thai.

Indian curry is largely considered a British fusion, and typically incorporates a blend of toasted spices ground into a powder, called masalas. These curries are water- or broth-based, sometimes thickened with yogurt or sour cream. Indian curry sauces are world-renown for their fiery heat and robust flavors.

Thai curry often calls for a spicy wet curry paste and uses coconut milk or coconut cream. They are more soup-like. Thai curries

are cooked for a shorter period of time and typically include vegetables, chicken, seafood, accented with fresh herbs like mint, cilantro, and basil.

Most Thai curries come in three main colors: yellow, green, and red. Yellow curry paste is used for light meats like poultry and seafood, as well as vegetarian curries. It gets the bright yellow color from the yellow peppers and an abundance of turmeric, which makes it sweet and mellow. Fresh and bright green chilies give green curry the bright color and spicy kick. Curries made with green curry paste are sharp, hot, and not as rich or deep as the other two. Red curry is perfect for just about anything. It is bold with a mild spiciness. It's a good starting point if you aren't afraid of spice. The deep, rich flavor and color comes from the red chilies that are used to make this paste.



Indian curry pastes and sauces tend to either be yellow in color and mild or a hot deep red to dark brown. Just remember, most curries range in heat/spiciness depending on the chef and the base ingredients.

It's hard to decide which type of curry is the best. The best curries are made from a combination of both dry and fresh ingredients. Some are made from a curry paste, while others call for curry powder among other ingredients. There is no right

or wrong way to make curry, but it does help to have a good recipe and include all ingredients called for in the recipe. Then, the best tip is to use your tastebuds and adjust the final dish according to your liking. In the end, it all comes down to a matter of taste.

### Sources

- Reluctant Gourmet, [thereluctantgourmet.com](http://thereluctantgourmet.com)
- The Spruce Eats, [thespruceeats.com](http://thespruceeats.com)
- Serious Eats, [seriouseats.com](http://seriouseats.com)



Vicki Hayman  
University Extension Educator  
Nutrition & Food Safety, NE Area  
Newcastle, Wyoming  
307-746-3531 • [vhayman@uwyo.edu](mailto:vhayman@uwyo.edu)



*Issued in furtherance of extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Kelly Crane, director, University of Wyoming Extension, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.*

*The University's policy has been, and will continue to be, one of nondiscrimination, offering equal opportunity to all employees and applicants for employment on the basis of their demonstrated ability and competence without regard to such matters as race, sex, gender, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, genetic information, political belief, or other status protected by state and federal statutes or University Regulations.*

*Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by University of Wyoming is implied.*