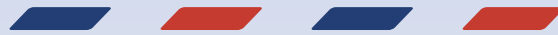


SAAG AND GRITS



This is your antidote to boring sauteed spinach. I was inspired to create this recipe after visiting Katlin and Mohsin Kazmi, a couple who beautifully fuses the foodways of Appalachia with Mohsin's Pakistani heritage: the saag and grits they serve at their food truck, The Pakalachian, includes the invasive Appalachian weed called kudzu. My version includes Swiss chard, mustard greens, and baby spinach, each cooked just long enough to lose their rawness. I add a masala that gives the dish both heat and warmth, cream to temper the bitterness of the greens, and amchur (dried mango powder) to add tartness.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- ½ teaspoon black peppercorns
- 2 whole cloves
- 3 dried red chiles
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 2 red onions, diced (about 2½ cups)
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon minced ginger
- 1 to 2 hot green chiles, such as jalapenos or serranos (depending on heat preference), quartered lengthwise
- 2 cups diced tomatoes
- Kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon amchur (dry mango powder)
- ½ teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1 (about 12-ounce) bunch Swiss chard, leaves stripped from stalks and cut into ½-inch-wide ribbons, stalks cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 (about 9-ounce) bunch mustard greens, leaves cut into ½-inch-wide ribbons, stalks removed and discarded
- 2 tablespoons dried fenugreek leaves (kasoori methi), crushed into a rough powder with your hands
- 5 ounces baby spinach
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 teaspoon garam masala
- 1 cup heavy cream
- Grits (recipe follows)

1. Equipment: Small saute pan or wok, mortar and pestle or spice grinder, large pot
2. In a small dry saute pan (or small wok) over medium high heat, stir peppercorns and cloves and stir frequently until fragrant and smoking, 60 to 90 seconds. Transfer to a mortar and pestle or spice grinder. Add dried chiles to the hot pan and saute until darkened slightly, 30 seconds. Transfer to the mortar and pestle or spice grinder, grind mixture into a fine powder, and set aside.

3. In a large pot, warm oil over medium high heat. Add cumin seeds and stir until they darken and become fragrant, 30 seconds. Add onion and saute, stirring frequently and covering the pan between stirs, until glassy, adding up to a tablespoon more oil if the onions begin to catch on the bottom, about 5 minutes. Add garlic, ginger, and chiles, and saute just for a minute, then add tomatoes and 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Cover, reduce heat to medium, and let cook, stirring occasionally, until tomatoes have collapsed, 4 to 5 minutes.
4. Add amchur and turmeric, and stir for two minutes. Add the chard stems and 1 cup water, stir, cover, and simmer until the stems lose a bit of their color, 4 to 5 minutes. Add mustard leaves and fenugreek, cover, and cook until the leaves wilt under the heat of the other ingredients, about 5 minutes. Add chard leaves, 1 cup water, and a pinch of salt, and cook until chard is wilted, about 10 minutes. Taste and add salt if necessary.
5. Stir in the spinach and 1 cup of water, cover, and cook until spinach is softened, about 2 minutes to soften spinach. The mixture should be moist, but not soupy. Add the butter, garam masala, 1 teaspoon of the spice powder, and a pinch of salt. Stir, cover pan, and cook, stirring occasionally and adding a little water if too dry, until mixture is soft and wet, about 8 minutes. Add cream, reduce the heat to low, cook for 2 to 3 minutes, then taste. The cream will have tamped down the heat level: add more of the spice mixture if you prefer. At this point, if I was serving this to Krishna, who doesn't like spicy food, I would leave it alone; if I was serving myself, I'd add more of the spice mixture. Serve over the grits.

GRITS

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 1½ cups chicken stock
 - Kosher salt
 - 1 cup stone-ground grits, washed well in a fine-mesh strainer
 - ½ cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
 - 1/3 cup heavy cream
 - 2 tablespoons butter
 - ½ teaspoon white pepper (or substitute black pepper)
1. In a large saucepan over high heat, mix 3½ cups water, 1 cup of chicken stock, and ½ teaspoon salt, and bring to a boil. Slowly whisk in the grits in a steady stream or sprinkle in with your hands, stirring until blended (this will avoid clumping). Return to a boil, then reduce heat, cover, and simmer, whisking frequently, until liquid is absorbed and grits are tender, adding the rest of the chicken stock and more water if necessary, about 40 minutes.
 2. Remove the grits from the heat. Stir in the cheese, cream, butter, white pepper, and ½ teaspoon salt. Taste and add salt and pepper if necessary. Cover to keep warm until ready to serve.