

BBC
BOOKS

THE INCREDIBLE SPICE MEN



**A SPICY TWIST
ON YOUR
FAVOURITE
DISHES**

Cyrus Todiwala & Tony Singh



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About the Book

Acclaimed chefs Tony Singh and Cyrus Todiwala are on a mission to wake Britain up to the versatility of spices.

For too long, our spices have sat unused and dusty in cupboard shelves, when just a mere sprinkling of cumin, a dash of turmeric or a handful of star anise has the power to turn our everyday food into an explosion of tastes and smells.

Tony and Cyrus have taken to the road, exploring the British Isles and adding their own spicy twist to our most classic and best-loved dishes. Try jazzing up a Sunday roast chicken with a honey and ginger, adding a cumin and coriander kick to a shepherd's pie or lacing a Victoria sponge with aromatic fennel seeds and cardamom.

With delicious, everyday recipes accompanied by Cyrus and Tony's top tips and favourite spices, *The Incredible Spice Men* will demystify the contents of your spice rack, and open your everyday cooking up to a world of exciting new flavours.

About the Authors

Cyrus Todiwala OBE DL was born in Bombay and has lived in England for over twenty years. As well as running three successful restaurants, he has written a number of cookery books. A passionate campaigner for sustainability and British produce, Cyrus was awarded an MBE and an OBE, is a Deputy Lieutenant of Greater London, and cooked for the Queen on her Diamond Jubilee Tour in 2012.

Tony Singh was born in Leith, and has held positions on the Royal Yacht Britannia and at the Balmoral Hotel, as well as running a string of award-winning restaurants in Edinburgh. A winner of the Scottish Chefs' Award for Scottish Chef of the Year, Tony also oversees several pop-up restaurants and a cookery school. He has a passion for combining British ingredients with flavours influenced by his Sikh upbringing.



THE INCREDIBLE SPICE MEN

CYRUS TODIWALA
TONY SINGH

alchemy
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
NICOLA GOUGH

BBC
BOOKS

INTRODUCTION

CYRUS TODIWALA

Tony and I have been friends for quite a time now, but we come from different sides of the world, and from different religious and social cultures. Tony is a Sikh and a fourth generation Scot, born in Scotland. I am a Parsee and Zoroastrian, born in Bombay, but England has been my home since I moved here over twenty years ago.

At the same time, though, Tony and I share much more than divides us: we are passionately British, although still very much tied to the subcontinent, and we are equally passionate about cooking, eating and spicing. Spices are in our blood, so it was almost inevitable that we should join in a quest to reintroduce Britain to the magic that is spices. Together we have become spice missionaries, and we hope very sincerely that we can convert you.

I grew up with spices; in India everyone does. My mother was a great cook, for a start – everything we ate was imbued with spices and flavour – and she was also a good teacher. Most of what I know today about cooking and cuisine started in my mother's kitchen. When I reached the age of responsibility – perhaps around seven? – I was sent to buy what we needed for the day's meals, animal, vegetable and spice. By this time, I knew what to look for in a spice: for example, the right colour of cardamom pod and peppercorns that hadn't been adulterated with dried papaya seeds. The stallholders would be scathing: 'Go away, child,' as I carefully watched their scale for an errant finger weighting it down. (Spices at that time were sold in 10g portions, so the scales were goldsmiths' scales, tiny,

easy to unbalance.) Later I earned some pocket money by doing the shopping for all of our neighbours. I would spend my earnings on fruit trifle, basically jelly and custard - I've always had a sweet tooth!

But the fact is, I knew my spices, and even now, everything to do with spices fascinates me. Spices are, variously and magically, the seeds, bark, buds, kernels, berries, pods, fruits and rhizomes of various trees, shrubs, vines and grasses. Most of the important spice plants come from tropical Asia: these include cassia, cardamom, cinnamon, pepper, star anise and cloves. Several spices, such as cumin, coriander, caraway, dill and fennel, originate from nearer home, from Europe and western Asia. And it was only in the sixteenth century that many spices from the Americas were introduced to Europe and the wider world, including such widespread flavours as allspice and vanilla.

Spices have been used since time immemorial, not only in cooking but also for medicinal purposes. For instance, cassia and cinnamon are both mentioned in Chinese herbals dating back some 4,500 years. Ayurvedic medicine in India has always valued spices, and in both China and India, spices are still used in cooking as much for their perceived ability to promote health as for the wondrous flavours they impart to food.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe, spices were very highly valued, and unbelievably expensive to buy. They were thought to be so protective against illness, including the dreaded plague, that many were willing to risk their lives in pursuit of them. It was the European appetite for spices, particularly for cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg, that was the driving force behind that era's great and dangerous voyages of discovery: Columbus, for instance, only discovered the Americas because he was seeking an alternative, westerly route to the East and its wealth of spices.

Spices were always an important item of trade. The Chinese took them along the Silk Road, the Arabs introduced them to Europe. But there was a dark heart to the spice trade. While fortunes were made, many lives were lost in the greedy pursuit of spices. However, control over the pepper trade, for instance, was one of the factors that led to the British Raj, to Anglo-Indian cuisine, to the spread of curry restaurants – and thus spices – throughout Britain from the 1920s.

It seems to me that Britain today has forgotten about spices to a large extent. Tony and I want to jog your memories, to get you to dust off old habits, to bring your spice jars from the back of the cupboard to the front (you can even keep them in your fridge – it will preserve the spices for much longer). We want you to re-think how and what you cook, every time you cook. In Britain we have some of the best meats and fish in the world, and a multitude of wonderful home-grown and imported fruit and vegetables. We also have access to some of the best spices in the world. Whenever I go back to India, I have to take spices with me, as the best Indian spices are actually exported to the UK!

Learn how to spice up your basic recipes – a pinch here and there – and don't be afraid. 'Spicy' doesn't necessarily mean 'hot': spices are also sweet, warm and pungent, and will add colour, drama and excitement to your everyday cooking. And we mean *every* day...

Tony and I share a simple message: let's spice up Britain again!









INTRODUCTION

TONY SINGH

Over the years of knowing Cyrus, I've absorbed a lot of Todiwala knowledge and philosophy and, although from different countries, essentially we're coming from the same place. We love cooking, food, British ingredients and spices – already a good enough basis for friendship! It's also a good excuse for us to get together, in the television programmes and in this book, to sell our concept of spicing to the Great British public. Cyrus thinks of us as missionaries, aiming for conversion. I think I'm more like a soldier preparing for battle...

For I am a Sikh, and the Sikhs are great warriors. I am a Sikh born in Scotland, and I am very proud to be both Scottish and Sikh. The Sikhism I inherited from my grandparents and parents has played a major part in defining who and what I am. Its central belief is equality between all people and this is regardless of religion, caste, colour, creed, age, gender or social status. (This was a really revolutionary idea in the caste-dominated society of India in the sixteenth century, when Sikhism began.) A cornerstone of Sikhism is the *langar*, or community kitchen, and preparing food, cooking food, helping to serve it and, yes, washing up, were all part of my life from the very earliest days. I was always hungry as a lad, so I soon learned that if I helped my aunties I would get extra goodies to eat – as well as a pat on the head! I later took a Home Economics class at school: I was quite attracted to the idea of cooking as a career by then but, to be honest, I mainly saw it as a skivers' class, like drama. However I won

an HE prize, which I didn't tell anyone about for a while: that wasn't what boys (or men) did in Scotland then!

And I can't deny the influence both my parents had on me as well. Mum, like Cyrus's mum, was a very good cook. She cooked traditional Punjabi food, which was quite difficult in Scotland because there was nothing in the way of ingredients, but as she'd had British-based domestic science classes at school too, she was able to cook Scottish treats for us - things like drop scones and shortbread (sometimes spiced). She was able to take elements from both cultures - she cooks a mean haggis pakora - and I have to admit that she's probably well ahead in the spice race that Cyrus and I have entered! Dad's input was no less significant. He had probably hoped to hand on his business - a corner shop - to his sons, but at the same time, very generously, he thought it important for us to follow our dreams. As a result, my brother joined the RAF, my younger brother went into window cleaning and I became a chef.







It was difficult at first. I was classically trained at college in Edinburgh, so kept away from the spices I had been brought up with. However, perhaps not surprisingly, as soon as possible employers saw me, they said, 'We don't do curry, son.' I had to fight extra hard - nobody was used to a chef with a turban - but gradually I got some really good jobs, amongst them the Royal Scotsman and the Royal Yacht Britannia (strictly no spices). Then, funnily enough, I remembered what I should never have forgotten, that spices actually enhance food, that they do just make food taste better.

The Great British public, too, seems to have forgotten about spices, although the country has a long history of spice use. The Romans, for instance, introduced many herbs and spices when they were here, over 2,000 years ago. In the Middle Ages, the Crusaders brought back spices that they had encountered in the Middle East. At around that time, British food became very highly spiced indeed, possibly to cover up the taste of salt (most meats and vegetables would have been salt-preserved) or tainted meat. The spice then seemed to go out of British life, possibly because of Puritanism - plain is best - although many think that the rigours of two world wars, and food rationing, had a lasting effect on the way the British cook.

There are still sneaky reminders of Britain's spicy past, though, in many historic British dishes - the cayenne sprinkled on top of fried whitebait, the devilled sauces for kidneys, mushrooms and eggs, the ginger in gingerbread and parkin, the cinnamon in mince pies, the nutmeg in custards, and the ubiquitous clove in apple pies. It is obvious that British cooking throughout the centuries has absorbed lots of influences, including spices, and I think it can learn to do so again. For a start, ask anyone what the best-known British dishes are, and I bet they list roast beef, fish and chips and - yes - chicken tikka masala! It's said to have been invented in Britain, when a restaurant customer

looked at their dry plate of chicken tikka, and asked 'Where's the gravy?' A quick heating through of tinned tomato soup plus a few spices (the masala), and a new Great British classic was allegedly born.

Britain has some of the best produce in the world - meat, fish, cheese, cider and (one of my personal favourites) whisky. I think such good produce, although great on its own, can be made even tastier with the addition of spice. You'll see, throughout the recipes in the book, how we have committed what looks like culinary treason on many of the most revered and traditional of British dishes. All I can say is, give it a try, see how you like it. To paraphrase Julius Caesar, another incoming soldier on a mission, 'We came, we saw and (we hope) spices have conquered.'

STARTERS,

SNACKS

& A LIGHT BITE OR TWO

Recipe List

Spiced Beetroot Soup

Hot & Sour Soup with Crispy Fish

Gazpacho with a Kick

Asparagus with Lime & Coriander Hollandaise

Warm Butternut Scones with Cheese

Mushroom Madras Blazer

Goat's Cheese, Red Onion & Caraway Seed Tart

Smoked Haddock & Mango Tart

Spiced Singh Gravlax

Smoked Salmon with Spiced Beetroot Salad

Hot & Sticky Prawns

Is it any wonder that most people hate beetroots when we completely waste them by boiling them up or serving them in vinegar? This is a great soup that I make all the time, and I always love seeing people's reactions when I serve it to them. They usually wince at the sight of beetroot, but don't say anything out of politeness, then are completely won over with the first sip. I've served this at some very snooty dinners and it has never let me down.

Cyrus's
**SPICED
BEETROOT SOUP**

SERVES 4

FOR THE SOUP

100g (4oz) split orange or yellow lentils
400g (14oz) beetroot, peeled and cut into 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) chunks
1 litre ($1\frac{3}{4}$ pints) boiling water
180ml (6fl oz) tinned coconut milk, plus extra to taste
 $\frac{1}{2}$ -1 tsp salt, or to taste

FOR THE SPICES

2 tbsp rapeseed oil, vegetable oil or other clear cooking oil
2 tsp black mustard seeds
1 tsp cumin seeds, gently crushed
a good handful of finely shredded curry leaves (optional)
2 tbsp chopped fresh coriander leaves
double cream, to drizzle (optional)

1 Wash the lentils well. If using yellow lentils, soak for 3 hours then drain. To a large pan add the prepared lentils, the beetroot and the boiling water. Bring to a boil and then reduce the heat, partly cover with a lid and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 45 minutes- $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours, until the

beetroot and lentils are tender. Add a little more boiling water if the mixture starts to look dry, but don't add too much as you don't want a watery soup.

- 2** Blend the mixture to a smooth purée, then strain through a fine sieve. Return the purée to a clean pan and stir in the coconut milk and salt. If necessary, add a little more boiling water to thin the soup, but it should be quite thick and velvety. Keep warm over a low heat.
- 3** To prepare the spices, heat the oil in a frying pan over a medium-high heat and have a lid handy. When the oil starts to just smoke add the mustard seeds, cover the pan (the seeds fly all over the place as they crackle and pop) and turn the heat down. After 10–15 seconds add the cumin and the curry leaves and fry for 1 minute.
- 4** Tip the contents of the frying pan, including any oil, into the soup and stir well. Taste, add salt if necessary, and dilute with hot water or a little more coconut milk if you prefer a lighter soup. Stir in the fresh coriander and serve in bowls, drizzled with a swirl of double cream if you like.



Spiced Beetroot Soup