

MADRAS FISH PILAF

In this recipe, I've tried to mirror the way a slow-cooked meat biryani is cooked, but instead of using meat, I've cut the cooking time in half by using fish and a store-bought curry paste.

I love it when I bring this dish to the table, as my guests are pleasantly surprised that under the fluffy white rice layer is a fragrant fish curry.

SERVES: 4 **PREP:** 10 MINUTES **COOK:** 1 HOUR 15 MINUTES

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 onion, finely sliced
3 cm piece of ginger, finely chopped
3 tablespoons Madras curry paste
1 x 400 g can whole peeled tomatoes, drained
1 x 400 ml can coconut milk
250 g frozen spinach, thawed
300 g (1 ½ cups) basmati rice
2 cardamom pods, crushed
1 fresh bay leaf
salt flakes
700 g blue-eye trevalla fillets (or kingfish, swordfish, blue grenadier or salmon), skin removed and pin-boned, cut into 5 cm chunks
20 g (¼ cup) crispy fried shallots
mango chutney, to serve

Heat the oil in a 3 litre flameproof casserole dish over medium heat. Add the onion and cook for 3–4 minutes to soften and caramelize before adding the ginger. Stir regularly for 2 minutes, then add the curry paste and cook for a minute until fragrant. Tip in the tomatoes and break up with a wooden spoon, then pour in the coconut milk. Increase the heat to high and bring to the boil. Cook, stirring regularly so the sauce doesn't catch, for 10 minutes until thickened. Add the spinach and cook for a further 5 minutes until the sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon. Remove from the heat and cool for 10–15 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Rinse the rice three or four times in cold water until the water runs clear. Pour 1 litre of water into a large saucepan, add the cardamom and bay leaf and bring to the boil. Add the rice and a pinch of salt and cook for 5–8 minutes until al dente. Drain, reserving the cardamom and bay leaf to flavour the rice while it cooks in the oven.

Place the fish in the sauce and fold through. Top with the rice, spread out evenly with the back of a spoon and sprinkle on 3 tablespoons of water to ensure the rice steams and stays moist. Cover with foil and a tight-fitting lid and bake for 40 minutes until the rice is cooked. Scatter over the crispy fried shallots and serve with some mango chutney on the side.



PANTRY STAPLES

Basmati rice
Bay leaf
Canned whole peeled tomatoes
Cardamom pods
Coconut milk
Crispy fried shallots
Fresh ginger
Frozen spinach
Madras curry paste
Onion
Salt
Vegetable oil



SHOPPING LIST

Mango chutney
White fish fillets



Crispy fried shallots can be found in the Asian aisle of your supermarket. Another lovely alternative for a slight textural contrast is lightly toasted desiccated coconut.

Mango chutney can be found in the Asian and Indian section of the supermarket.

If you feel like a change from fish fillets, fish cutlets are a great option. This cut is like a fish steak with the centre bone still attached. I like to use cutlets when my fishmonger has them, as the bone keeps the fish incredibly moist.

The madras curry paste can be swapped for goan, tikka masala or korma curry paste, if you like.