

Japanese comfort food: Curry and rice



Cooking Japanese comfort foods with fresh and organic ingredients

Caroline Ishii
Columnist

WAKEFIELD, Que. — Every culture has its comfort food. For the Japanese, I believe one is Japanese curry.

Growing up in Toronto, I loved when my mother made Japanese curry for dinner, especially with Japanese rice and pickles. Later, I learned this is one of the favourite dishes of children in Japan. No wonder, with its rich, fruity, mild curry flavour, it is delicious and comforting.

When I want to introduce Japanese home cooking to customers, I start with Japanese curry. People are often surprised that Japan has a curry, and I tell them curry is one of the most popular dishes in Japan. It could be considered a national dish. There are restaurants and shops in Japan that specialize in curry. And beyond the



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Left: The fresh autumn harvest at Juniper Farm last month. Right: As a chef at Juniper Farm, Caroline uses the fresh, organic recipes to make dishes like Japanese curry.

beloved curry rice, several popular dishes have emerged, including curry udon and curry bread, a decadent curry-filled pastry.

The History of Japanese Curry

Indian curry spices came to Japan in the late 1800s. The Indian subcontinent was under British colonial rule, and the Roy-

al Navy brought the spice mix called curry powder to Japan. Chefs began experimenting with

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the spices and serving *kare raisu* (curry rice) in restaurants. Diners loved the exotic and rich flavours.

What is curry?

Curry is not one spice. Instead, curry powder is a combination of many. It can include cumin, coriander, turmeric, ginger, mustard seeds, fenugreek, cloves, and black pepper.

British manufacturers created curry powder to be a ready-made

version of the flavours of South India. Curry in Britain referred to a meat or vegetable dish cooked in a spiced gravy and served with rice.

As a result of trade, each country, including Japan, created its version of curry to adapt to local tastes and ingredients.

My Japanese-inspired curry

I discovered that the packaged instant Japanese curry roux I grew up on often has monosodium glutamate (MSG) and other additives. So, I experimented to find a curry recipe that is healthier but with a similar taste.

I either buy garam masala, a blend of ground spices used in Indian cuisine, or make my own.

I add red lentils to thicken the sauce naturally and make the dish vegan. Sometimes I add chickpeas or tempeh (fermented soybeans).

As a chef at Juniper Farm, I love making Japanese curry. The organic vegetables I use change with the season. Lately, I've been roasting vegetables such as heirloom squash, pumpkin, rutabaga, turnips, and radishes and pour the curry sauce over them.

If you want the curry spicier, you can add some hot sauce, either in the curry or on the side.

See Chef Caroline Ishii's Japanese-inspired curry recipe below. To learn more about Juniper Farm visit www.juniperfarm.ca.

Chef Caroline Ishii's Japanese-inspired curry (vegan, gluten-free)

Perfect for the colder weather, a warm bowl of Japanese curry

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Chef Caroline Ishii's Japanese-inspired curry (vegan, gluten-free)

Serves 4 to 6 people

Ingredients:

- 2 onions, halved lengthwise, thinly sliced
- 3 tbsp garam masala
- 1 tsp. cayenne pepper (less if you want it mild, more if you want it spicy)
- 3 tbsp rice flour
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 carrots, medium diced
- 4 cups stock
- 2 potatoes, medium diced
- 1 apple, peeled, cored, and small diced
- 1 ripe banana, peeled and chopped
- 1 ½ cups dried red lentils, rinsed, drained
- 1 can of coconut milk

Directions:

1. Heat vegetable oil in a large saucepan over medium heat.
2. Sauté the onions until they are golden brown and caramelized, around 20 to 30 minutes.
3. Add the garam masala and



PHOTO CREDIT: JUNIPER FARM

At Juniper Farm, Caroline roasts fresh veggies like heirloom squash, pumpkin, rutabaga, turnips, and radishes and pours the curry sauce over them.

- cayenne pepper, stirring for a few minutes.
4. Add the rice flour, stirring for a few minutes.
5. Stir in the tomato paste, combining with other ingredients.
6. Add the carrots, potatoes, apple, banana, and red lentils.
7. Cover with the stock and bring to a boil.

8. Simmer for about 30 minutes, occasionally stirring, until the lentils and vegetables are tender. Stir in the coconut milk at the end.
9. Season with sea salt and freshly ground pepper.
10. Serve over rice. Add hot sauce on the side.

From SATO P. 6

clothes, shoes, or hats. There are plenty of vegetables, and we can buy chicken meat and eggs cheaply. Therefore, compared to life in the city, it does not cost much to live here. I still wear the coat and suits I used to wear in Vancouver. (I only dress up once a week when we go to the church; otherwise, I just wear work clothes).

Mrs. Sato also continues to wear the old clothes from Vancouver days by remaking them. As for the day-to-day clothes, she goes to Edmonton once a year, buys some cotton fabric, and sews them herself.

You wrote about perms. She only had a perm done on her hair twice in the past six years (once at Ikeda-san's in Slocan, while we were travelling, and the other time when we went to Vancouver last year).

When we went to your area last year, Haruo-san said you offered to do perm for Mrs. Sato, but we did not have enough time for it, which was regrettable. Basically, our life now is that of senin [hermit].

But Kiyo-chan!

Mentally, I am always thinking of all over Canada. Fortunately, just like you, many people comfort this old teacher, and I receive letters one after another. (At the same time as your letter, I received a letter from Tomita Shotaro-kun, who is also in Montreal.) I received three to four hundred Christmas cards.

The post office staff here says, "You receive most mail." I respond to each card and letter,

which I enjoy and find consoling. I feel joy and pride in thinking probably there are not many Japanese in Canada who receive this many letters.

Among the graduates of 1918 (the first graduates of mine in Canada), Mitsugu Shimokura (doctor), Tameo Aoki (Furuya Shoten), and Gakuto Hayami (now a foreman of a company in Montreal) have been corresponding with me for 30 years. Hiroko Funashi (nee Sato) and Katsuko Arima (both graduates of 1919) have also sent me letters for almost 30 years.

As for your class, you, Hiroshi Nagato, Sueko Murata, and Ayako Shimokura (nee Ishiwaru) kindly send me Christmas cards for over 20 years. It is our pride to have these compassionate and appreciative students. Therefore, even though we live materially a poor life, we feel we live a rich and blessed life mentally.

Lastly, I will let you know of your store on Heatley Street in Vancouver. Last August, as I passed on Alexander Street, I decided to stop by your store at that corner.

A young Chinese man of about 30 years was managing the store. The store was well stocked. He said he bought the shop from the previous owner at just over \$3,000, and business was "very good".

Please give our best regards to Haruo-kun and Kita-san. Please say hello to Ken-chan, Mie-chan, Rei-chan, and Kiyoshi-chan.

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