

FOOD

SAFFRON



Zafrani Paneer Tikka

Being one of the strongest and most flavourful of spices, saffron has the ability to take the taste levels of any dish several notches higher. “Once infused with milk it can create wonders with desserts like kheer, shrikhand, cheesecake as well as panna cotta and is very commonly used in eastern food culture to flavour biryanis and rice dishes,” says Sahil Wadhwa, Director, Wadhwa Bakers.

Chef Yogender Pal, Executive Chef at JW Marriott Jaipur Resort & Spa says, “Saffron is either added in a powdered form or it is soaked in milk or water and heated – this extracts the colour and flavour.” Saffron needs moisture to release its flavour. “I like to soak the saffron in stock or wine rather than water to add to the overall flavour of a dish,” says Executive Chef Sheriyar Dotivala, The Resort Hotel, Mumbai.

Saffron has a delicate flavour which needs to be gently handled and should not be mixed with high flavour nodes or very spicy dishes. Besides biryani and kheer, saffron is also a delightful addition to fish recipes. “In fact, you can use saffron with just about any food like chicken broth, potatoes, bread, cakes and ice cream dishes. Not the most common preference but sometimes, a hint of saffron with vegetables such as cauliflower, dried legumes or green beans is also pretty good,” says celebrity chef Amrita Raichand.

There are mainly three varieties of saffron in the market – Indian saffron, Iranian saffron and Spanish saffron. Sejal Shah, Co-founder and owner, MAIA Eat, Bake, Mom adds, “When used with other spices care should be taken that the latter do not overpower the musky note of the saffron.” Manish Kusumwal, Corporate Chef, Keys Hotels explains, “The most important rule of using saffron in dishes is to avoid adding it in the cooking process. Instead it should be added from the top or in the end process of cooking.” ■



GNOCCHI WITH VEGETABLES IN SAFFRON SAUCE (COURTESY MAIA EAT, BAKE, MOM)

INGREDIENTS

For white sauce

| | |
|---------------------|---------|
| All-purpose flour | 100 gms |
| Butter | 35 gms |
| Milk | 200 ml |
| Saffron | A pinch |
| Salt as required | |
| White pepper powder | 1/4 tsp |

Vegetables sauteed in butter

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|--------------------------|--------|
| Zucchini green | 30 gms |
| Bell pepper red & yellow | 20 gms |
| Broccoli | 20 gms |

Gnocchi

| | |
|----------------------|---------|
| Boiled mashed potato | 100 gms |
| All purposes flour | 45 gms |
| Salt | A pinch |

METHOD

TO MAKE THE GNOCCHI

Mix mashed potatoes, salt and flour lightly, so as not to develop gluten. Roll the dough and cut into small

pieces. Put the pieces into the boiling water and remove them as soon as they start floating.

TO MAKE THE WHITE SAUCE

In a pan take some butter, add flour to it and roast it. Add milk to the flour mix and stir it till it thickens into a velvety sauce. Add seasonings, saffron and sautéed vegetables in the sauce. Garnish it with Parmesan crisps.

TIPS FOR COOKING WITH SAFFRON

- Use the saffron in very minimum quantities as too much can make the food bitter.
- Saffron has to be used after roasting or warming the saffron soaked in milk or water. Do not use it directly.
- For better colour and aroma soak saffron in water before you use it.
- For each teaspoon of saffron, add 3 tsp of liquid.
- When adding saffron to soups, stews, salad dressings, and other recipes with a lot of liquid, you can simply toss the crushed threads in with the rest of the ingredients. Saffron should not be burnt.
- In cooking, do not ever make use of wooden utensils when stirring saffron, as they absorb the spice.
- Use Grade 1 Certified Saffron only