



CORRECT

LINE

COOKING

## *Sweet Smell of Excess*

I write this month in praise of smelling: smelling as a verb and as an attribute. Smell as a sense opens us up to the world's vagaries in a particularly vulnerable way. Commentaries waft up our nose quite against our will. We can't close our noses in the way we shut our eyes against that which we do not wish to see, at least not without the use of our hands. Turning our noses up does not help either. We are constantly touched by the gentle or rough hand of smell; penetrated by the pheromones of fate.

Indeed, smell takes us back to babyhood and the pre-guilt era when we thought bodies were totally about pleasure. The alleys of our minds may hide rotting garbage, but they also perhaps contain the whiff of those who cared for us before we learned not to stick our noses in where they didn't belong. The smells of mother, in most cases. Which probably explains why we desperately deny these pleasures.

Smell is perhaps the most underrated sense. We more often hear of it as a negative. Something smelly is generally thought of as something

strange at best and suspicious or downright off at worst. The nostrils of the dominant paradigm sense peculiarity in most things said to smell—such as fish, animals and women. At the same time, good smelling things are more or less totally the province of femininity. Think of perfume, flowers and food. Indeed, the Great Nose of History sometimes puts women (or should that be Woman?) in this category, as in Spenser's "her sweet odour did them all excell". The notion that the smells of the body, and of the female body in particular, are somehow to be suppressed has resulted in such wonders as the deodorised sanitary napkin which I assume still adorns the underconfident panties of teenagers throughout this wide brown land. But some of you are probably frowning at the eruption, or should that be seeping, of such unpopular subjects into the pristine pages of this journal. Let there be an end to redness, as the actress said to the commissar.

Two further instances of the lack of attention given to smell by our sight-biased minds. Firstly, we have very few words to describe this sense. We say that something smells like something, not that a food has a bright smell, or a soft smell. What would the olfactory equivalent of tangy be? (Perhaps tangy?) There is no common word for a lack of a sense of smell as there is for the lack of sight or hearing. We would probably say smell-blind. Secondly, noses are generally not praised, but are often the cause of mirth. Only as a phallic indicator of size in the male of our species is a big nose an item of any worth.

Smell runs into taste like the back of our noses into our throats. To cook for smell and taste is the opposite of the type of 'entertaining' which I hereby dub 'cooking for the boss' whereby appearance (and expense) are all. Smell is very non-bourgeois. It is a cunt of a sense and will linger around your house for hours, tangy with your tongue long after the meal itself has disappeared, denying that there must be a definite end to pleasure.

Curry is, at its best, replete with delicate smells which prefigure and follow the actual main game. I do not have space here to examine the ways in which foods from outside the Anglo tradition are often called smelly as a criticism, though I still hear this stupidity born of willed ignorance from time to time. Be a devil and eat this recipe with your fingers. It will mark you as a smell and taste lover to the visual world. A succubus. A skunk. One who breathes it all in with his or her eyes shut. Enjoy.

### *Nepalese Pea and Potato Curry*

(From *The Curry Cookbook* by Charmaine and Reuben Solomon—which is worth nosing through.)

Serves 4

3 tablespoons ghee and oil mixture  
1 large onion, finely sliced  
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper  
3 green chillis, chopped  
2 teaspoons finely-chopped garlic  
1 teaspoon finely-chopped fresh ginger  
1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric  
1 teaspoon salt, or to taste  
500g potatoes, peeled and cubed  
2 cups fresh green peas  
2 large tomatoes, chopped  
2 teaspoons ground coriander  
1 teaspoon toasted ground cummin  
1 cup hot water  
Garnish: 2 tablespoons fresh coriander leaves, chopped

Heat ghee and oil mixture in a saucepan and fry onion till soft and golden. Stir in pepper, chillis, garlic, ginger, turmeric and salt. Continue cooking for 2 or 3 minutes, then add potatoes and stir till light brown all over.

Add remaining ingredients and hot water, stir well, cover and simmer till vegetables are tender and the oil shows on the surface. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve with chapatis or rice, and accompaniments.

Good accompaniments might be a raita—such as bananas mixed with yoghurt, and which would contrast with the curry—or a chutney.

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