

FROM ITS BIRTHPLACE ON INDIA'S NORTHERN BORDER, THE LUSCIOUS MANGO HAS GONE ON TO CAPTIVATE THE WORLD

MAY IN DELHI has always been the same. Hot *loo* winds blow as if from furnaces gone wild, bringing with them the burning sands of the neighboring Rajasthan desert, which swirl and twirl and creep under firmly closed doors with gritty determination. But the same sun that scorches the air and sand is benevolent to the green mangoes that hang pendulously, expectantly, from tall, shady trees. It kisses those sleeping beauties and puts a blush on them. Summers in North India may be hard and raw, but the powers that be have provided the most generous compensation: mangoes, the king of fruit. • Even I, growing up in Delhi, never thought of mangoes as ordinary fruit. Their season was so short. They arrived at a time of anxiety, when long

BY
MADHUR
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Paul Gauguin's 1892 painting *Vahine No Te Vi (Woman with a Mango)*, inset right. Facing page, peeling a ripe kent mango.



KING OF FRUIT

M A N G O E S

days of school exams were followed by a wait for the results and then the results themselves. As stomachs churned and nerves frayed, my mother would relax us by saying, "Do you know what your father has just bought from the market? A dozen langras and a dozen dusehris." Mangoes in India are always referred to by their variety, just as cheeses are in Europe. Langras come from groves around the holy city of Varanasi (formerly Benares). Their skin stays dark green, the flesh is pale yellow, and their flavor is mildly sweet and sour. My sisters ate no other kind. For me, the elegantly sweet—though far from sugary—dusehris from near Lucknow, with their oval, elongated, Modigliani shape and their yellowish-orange skin, were the best of all.

In my childhood, mangoes were both local and seasonal. You ate what the area around you produced, when it produced it. Northerners like us ate northern mangoes. We hardly cared or knew what the rest of India was eating. All that began to change in my late teens. One magical year, a mango new to us appeared in the market: the alphonso, brought in from India's central-west coast, an area that was once a Portuguese colony. It looked like a painted version of some ideal, mythical mango, a glowing orange with dabs of red, green, and yellow. Ah, we said, it just *looks* good. Then we tasted it. The thick, orange-yellow flesh was as smooth as butter and sweeter than the best of peaches; it had no flaw. We were awed.

MANGOES ARE PART OF INDIA'S HEART AND HISTORY

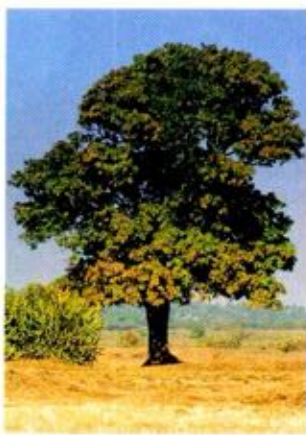
An Indian mango tree, below.

Below right, mango chutney.

Facing page, sorting mangoes

at the Sanghavi farm in

Umbergaon, in western India.



MANGOES HAVE always been part of India's heart and history. The mango, *Mangifera indica*, seems to have originated in northeastern India, near the border of Myanmar, some 4,000 years ago. The Buddha's preferred place of meditation was a shady mango grove. The 16th-century Mughal emperor Akbar, a Muslim of Mongol ancestry, completely endeared himself to the native Hindu populace by planting a garden of 100,000 choice mango trees in the northern state of Bihar. Even today, many Hindu marriages take place with auspicious mango leaves on the wedding pavilion. It is the country's most important fruit, and India is the world's leading mango producer, with an annual yield of close to 11 million tons—though it exports a mere 1.6 percent of what it grows; Indians consume the bulk of the crop.

From India, the mango spread north to China and to Southeast Asia,

SAVEUR contributing editor MADHUR JAFFREY's most recent book is *From Curries to Kebabs: Recipes from the Indian Spice Trail* (Clarkson Potter, 2003).

R E C I P E

Aam Ki Chatni

(Mango Chutney)

MAKES 2½–3½ CUPS

THE OVAL, flat-sided pit of a ripe mango has a tough, fibrous husk that surrounds a softer seed within. In green, thoroughly unripe mangoes, which are used in many Indian chutneys and pickles, that seed husk often hasn't yet hardened. Many recipes for green mango chutney and pickle require that you use this husk (but never the inner seed) because it helps the chunks of flesh attached to it retain their shape as the pickle softens and matures. Jaffrey included this recipe in her 1999 book *Madhur Jaffrey's World Vegetarian* (Clarkson Potter).

3 small or 2 large (about 1 lb.) green (unripe) mangoes
(see page 80)

2 tsp. salt

2–4 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped

1" piece ginger, peeled and
coarsely chopped

1½ cups cider vinegar

2 cups plus 2 tbsp. sugar

¼ cup golden raisins

1 tsp. cayenne

½ tsp. ground turmeric

1. Using a large sharp knife, halve mangoes lengthwise, cutting through pit. Discard inner seed, leaving husk of pit intact; then peel mangoes. Cut mangoes, including husks of pits if soft, into ¾"-thick slices and cut slices into ¾" dice (see page 80). Put diced mangoes into a nonreactive bowl, add 1 tsp. of the salt, and toss well. Cover and let rest at room temperature for 24 hours. Drain mangoes; pat dry.

2. Put garlic and ginger into a blender and purée with just enough of the vinegar (about 2 tbsp.) to make a fine paste. Transfer paste to a nonreactive medium saucepan. Add sugar, raisins, cayenne, turmeric, and the remaining salt and vinegar and stir well. Bring to a simmer over medium heat. Simmer until very slightly thickened, about 15 minutes. Add mangoes and return chutney to a simmer, stirring often. Gently simmer until mangoes are translucent and chutney has thickened some more, 30–35 minutes. Adjust seasonings with salt and cayenne, if you like.

3. Transfer chutney while still hot into a clean glass or ceramic jar and let cool. Cover tightly with a noncorrosive lid and store in the refrigerator for up to 3 months. Chutney mellows as it sits.





CARRIE • A green-yellow specialty mango with a tart-sweet orange-grape flavor that can take on notes of vanilla and cardamom with ripening. Smooth, firm texture.



GOLDEN NUGGET
Smallish, with sweet, deep orange flesh tasting of cantaloupe and coconut. As with many specialty mangoes, its peak lasts merely a day or two.

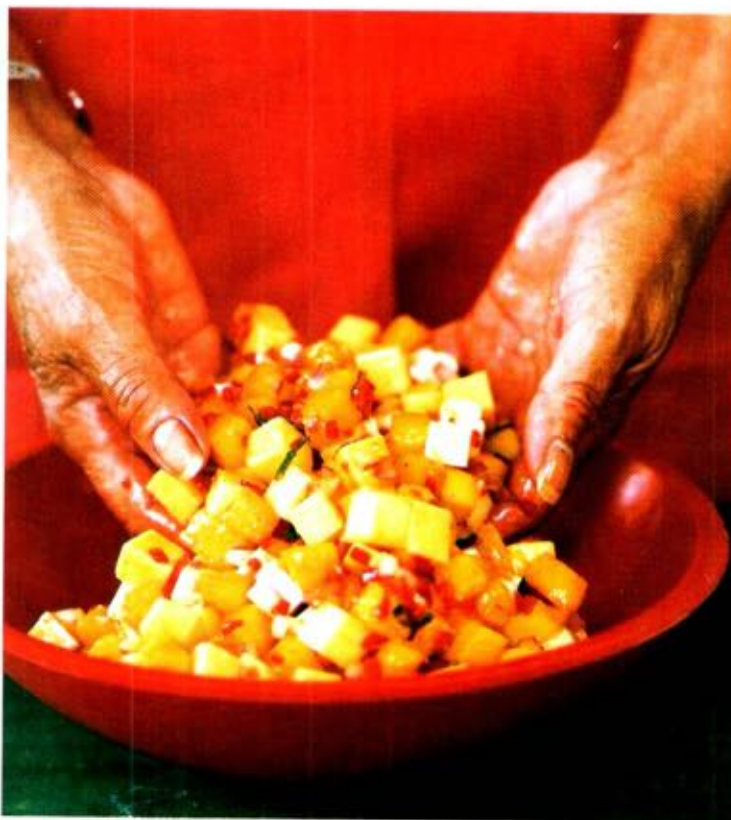


HADEN • The first major commercial mango in the U.S.; emerged in 1910 from the garden of Mrs. Florence Haden of Coconut Grove, Florida. Good-looking but often fibrous.

M A N G O E S

ONE JUICY PARTY

For three days every July, the humid, jewel green Fairchild Tropical Garden, in Coral Gables, Florida, teems with thousands of mango lovers from around the world, feasting on and learning about umpteen plump, sweet, juicy, perfectly ripened mangoes, all harvested from trees grown there in the garden. The International Mango Festival is a brainchild of Richard J. Campbell, the garden's senior curator of tropical fruit, who 13 years ago took what was a small, informal annual gathering of mango growers, scientists, and enthusiasts and made it public—with the aim of showing Americans, stuck in a land of generally inferior mangoes, just how glorious the fruit can be. To visit the festival is to plunge into a multi-dimensional mango world that begins with sales of trees (miniature trees, perfect for that condo balcony, are popular). The weekend carries on with massive tastings attended by as many as 4,000 people, for which Campbell selects ten varieties that showcase a spectrum of flavors, as well as smaller tastings with up to 80 varieties, where, he says, "people are fighting for tastes". (Indian mangoes are the theme this year.) Out on the lawns, vendors sell fresh mangoes and all kinds of mango food—muffins, breads, chutneys, jams—and mango-themed paintings, mosaics, and decorative pots. Bands play mango songs. Workshops teach home growers how to raise a productive tree. Kids run around with temporary mango tattoos and play Mr. and Mrs. Mango Head with big fresh mangoes. There's a fancy mango brunch, a recipe contest, and a competition for the most bizarre mango (last year, one entrant insisted his mango resembled Nixon). A spirited mango auction, at which Campbell drives bids high with affectionate and strange mango stories, closes the festival—and neatly takes care of all the gorgeous fruit displayed over the weekend. (See **THE PANTRY**, page 102, for details.) —THE EDITORS



R E C I P E

Mango and Queso Blanco Salsa

MAKES ABOUT 7 CUPS

THIS RECIPE was given to us by **SAVEUR** contributor, cookbook author, and restaurateur Maricel Presilla. She recommends serving the salsa with grilled fish or chicken.

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| <i>1/3 cup fresh orange juice</i> | <i>4 large ripe or semiripe mangoes,</i> |
| <i>1/3 cup fresh lime juice</i> | <i>or combination of ripe, semi-</i> |
| <i>1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil</i> | <i>ripe, and green (unripe) man-</i> |
| <i>1 1/2 tbsp. honey</i> | <i>goes, peeled, pitted, and cut</i> |
| <i>1 clove garlic, peeled and</i> | <i>into 1/2" cubes (see page 80)</i> |
| <i>minced</i> | <i>1 small red bell pepper, stemmed,</i> |
| <i>Salt</i> | <i>seeded, and finely chopped</i> |
| <i>1 tsp. ground toasted dried</i> | <i>1 small red onion, peeled and</i> |
| <i>piquin chiles (see page 102)</i> | <i>chopped</i> |
| <i>or cayenne</i> | <i>4 oz. queso blanco (see page</i> |
| <i>1/4 tsp. dried oregano</i> | <i>102), cut into 1/2" cubes</i> |
| <i>1/4 tsp. cumin seeds, toasted</i> | <i>24 mint leaves, thinly</i> |
| <i>and ground</i> | <i>sliced</i> |

1. Whisk citrus juices, oil, honey, garlic, 2 1/2 tsp. salt, ground chiles, oregano, and cumin together in a large nonreactive bowl. Add mangoes, bell peppers, onions, and cheese and toss well. Adjust seasonings.
2. Add mint to salsa just before serving and toss well again. Serve salsa right away, or cover salsa and let rest at room temperature or in the refrigerator for up to 3 hours.



KEITT • A big, mildly sweet commercial mango, with greenish skin sometimes tinged with pink; selected in 1940 in Homestead, Florida. Good for pickling when green.



KENT • A commercial variety whose rosy skin is speckled with yellow dots. In the hands of the right grower, shipper, and seller, it can be delicious, with soft, brilliant orange flesh and rich peachlike flavor.



LEMON MERINGUE
A rare specialty mango with lemon yellow flesh. Appealingly tart and a bit grassy, with some fiber. Practically begs for whipped cream and sugar.

M A N G O E S

(continued from page 74) on the trees, because insects would get at them before people could; all over the world, they are picked slightly before they are ripe. But in the States, this semiripe fruit is commonly sold as is and eaten before it is really ready. In Asia, mangoes meant for eating ripe are, after they're picked, carefully placed in straw-lined baskets. The fruit seller holds them in the straw until they are ripe or sells them to knowledgeable customers, who might say to him, "I want to eat some of your best alphonsoes three days from now. What do you have?" The barely underripe fruit is taken home and wrapped in newspaper or straw and left unrefrigerated. When it gives to a firm touch, it is ripe and is either plunged into a bucket of icy water or refrigerated and devoured soon afterward. In Thailand, where ripe mangoes served with coconut-flavored glutinous rice are a much loved dessert, families often buy whole baskets of mangoes in straw and place them under their beds. When the aroma begins to overpower the room, the mangoes are considered ready!

In much of the world, mangoes are primarily eaten ripe. But semiripe mangoes can also have their uses; for instance, I once relished their faint sweetness and firm texture in a fish curry from an Indian restaurant in Johannesburg, South Africa. Completely hard, green, unripe mangoes (of any variety) have their place, too. In the Philippines I have been served mouth-puckeringly sour, pale green slices with a dip of bagoong, a salty fish paste, at the start of a meal; in Vietnam, I have had wonderful salads with green mango; and in a market in Thailand I have stood in line by a cart where the vendor threw green mango slices into a plastic bag, tossed some sugar, salt, and red chiles in, twirled the bag to mix its contents, and then handed it over.

But it is in the creation of chutneys and pickles, served daily in every Indian home and sold around the world, that green mangoes come into their own. Nature has made them both pectin-rich and acidic, ideal for preserves. Shortly after they appear on the trees, home cooks begin pickling, and the massive Indian preserve industry shifts into high gear. My grandmother used to make a golden ginger-mango chutney. For a special-occasion tea, she would go into her storeroom, dip a long ladle into a crock, and spoon some chutney into a glass bowl. We would put fat dollops of it on her homemade mutthrie—spicy, buttery little biscuits—and promptly enter a state of bliss.

THE PANTRY, page 102: How to contact U.S. growers of specialty mangoes, sources for hard-to-find Asian and Latin American ingredients, and information on visiting the International Mango Festival.

THE THAIS RIPEN MANGOES UNDER THEIR BEDS

A mango vendor at Dton Payom market in Chiang Mai, Thailand, below. Facing page, from Vietnam, green mango salad with grilled beef.



R E C I P E

Goi Xoai Voi Bo

(Green Mango Salad with Grilled Beef)

SERVES 2-4

THIS RECIPE is an adaptation of one we found in Mai Pham's *Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table* (HarperCollins, 2001). Asian basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), also known as Thai basil, has small, pointed leaves and a delicate licorice fragrance. See THE PANTRY, page 102, for hard-to-find Asian ingredients.

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 1-2 bird's-eye chiles, stemmed and chopped
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and chopped
- 4 1/2 tsp. sugar
- 4 1/2 tsp. nước mắm (Vietnamese fish sauce)
- Juice and some pulp of 1/2 lime

FOR THE SALAD:

- 3 small shallots, peeled
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 2 stalks lemongrass, trimmed, tender inner parts only, minced
- 2 tsp. nước mắm (Vietnamese fish sauce)
- 1 tsp. soy sauce
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 1/2 lb. beef top loin steak, sliced against the grain into 1/4"-thick strips
- 1 green (unripe) mango, peeled, pitted, and thinly sliced (see page 80)
- 6-8 sprigs cilantro, chopped
- 1/4 cup Asian basil leaves, torn into thirds
- 2 tbsp. unsalted roasted peanuts

1. For the dressing: Crush chiles, garlic, and sugar together with a mortar and pestle to a coarse paste. Transfer to a small bowl, stir in fish sauce, lime juice and pulp, and 1 1/2 tbsp. water, and set dressing aside.

2. For the salad: Cut 1 of the shallots in half crosswise. Finely chop 1 of the halves, transfer to a shallow medium dish, and set aside. Thinly slice remaining shallots crosswise, spread them out on paper towels, and let air-dry for 30 minutes. Combine sliced shallots and oil in a small heavy skillet and bring oil to a gentle boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook shallots, stirring occasionally with a slotted metal spoon, until light golden brown, 15-20 minutes (shallots will continue to darken when removed from the oil). Transfer shallots with slotted spoon to paper towels to let drain and cool. Save cooking oil for another use, if you like, or discard.

3. Add lemongrass, fish sauce, soy sauce, and sugar to dish with chopped shallots and stir until sugar dissolves. Add beef, mix until well coated, and let marinate at room temperature for 20 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, prepare a charcoal grill. Grill beef over medium-hot heat, turning once, until just cooked through, about 1 minute per side. Transfer grilled meat to a large bowl. Add mangoes and dressing and toss gently. Add cilantro, basil, peanuts, and fried shallots and toss gently again. Adjust seasonings and serve.