

Malai Paneer Kebabs

creamy vegetarian kebabs

mild

serves 2 – 3

Paneer is a fresh cheese which goes crispy but does not melt when fried or grilled. You can make your own paneer if you like (there is a recipe in The Curry House Cookery Book) but it's very convenient to buy it ready made in a block. In the UK it comes in 227g (8oz) packs which are sold in the larger supermarkets. In Indian restaurants it is often confusingly described as “cottage cheese”.

Paneer is versatile stuff. It has a mild taste of its own but responds well to being marinated and takes on the flavour of the marinade. If you can't get ready-made paneer and don't fancy making your own then this recipe works well with tofu or Quorn (although they won't go crisp like paneer). You can also make delicious Malai Kebabs with chunks of chicken breast.

The marinade is rich and creamy, hence the name (*malai* means cream). Although the marinade is heavy on the calories much of the oil and the fat from the cream and yoghurt will drip off the kebabs during cooking leaving behind a nutty golden coating.

ingredients

1 × 227g pack of paneer
2 fat cloves garlic
30mm piece fresh ginger
3 × 15ml spoons Greek-style (full cream) yoghurt
3 × 15ml spoons double (heavy) cream
3 × 15ml spoons ground almonds
1 × 15ml spoon groundnut oil or other vegetable oil
the seeds of 1 green cardamom pod – ground
freshly ground black pepper (about the same volume as the ground cardamom)
about $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of a 2.5ml spoon of hot chilli powder for a mild taste
1 × 5ml spoon ground coriander seed
1 × 2.5ml spoon ground cumin seed
 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 2.5ml spoon turmeric powder
1 × 5ml spoon lemon juice
salt to taste (if using chicken only add the salt at the last minute)

special equipment

mortar and pestle to grind the cardamom seeds
a hot barbecue grill where the charcoal has turned grey
kebab skewers (preferably double-pronged)
kebab rack (optional)

method

1. Take the block of paneer and cut it into largish chunks. My chunks came out at about 25mm × 20mm × 15mm each giving 24 chunks in all
2. Make the garlic paste by grating the garlic on the finest mesh of a grater. Discard any solid pieces you have left over. Otherwise use a garlic press and then mash the pieces with the back of a fork
3. Make the ginger paste by peeling off the skin and grating the ginger using the finest mesh on a grater
4. Add the garlic and ginger paste to a small bowl.
5. Take the green cardamom pod and spit it half with a sharp knife. Now take out all the little black seeds, place them in a mortar and grind them to a powder with a pestle. Scrape the ground cardamom into the bowl.
6. Add all the other ingredients, except the paneer, to the bowl and whisk until thoroughly mixed and smooth.
7. Now transfer the chunks of paneer and all the whisked marinade into a bowl which will just fit both. Using a metal spoon gently stir the marinade so that it completely covers each face of the paneer chunks.
8. Refrigerate the paneer and marinade for at least 2 hours and preferably 4 hours or more.
9. The marinade will appear to have set firm after the period of marination but, don't worry, it hasn't. Just stir again with a metal spoon to loosen it all up. If you are using chicken add the salt at this stage.

10. Thread the chunks of paneer onto skewers leaving a clear gap between the chunks. Some marinade will stay on some will fall off – it doesn't matter.
11. Cook the paneer at a medium height over the hot charcoal. Rotate the skewers regularly so the paneer (or chicken) is cooked evenly. This is where double-pronged skewers come into their own as the paneer all rotates at the same time rather than spinning around on the skewer itself.
12. Cook until the paneer is crisp and golden. If using chicken, cut a piece open to make sure the meat is not still pink inside. If it is, return the chicken kebabs to the barbecue and cook until done.



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