



Fivers

# Curries Made Healthier

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# Curries Made Healthier

Coconut milk contains a surprisingly high amount of saturated fat: 11 grams per 1/4 cup. Compare that to a Burger King Whopper, which contains 12 grams. A diet rich in saturated fats can contribute to increased total cholesterol and a lower ratio of HDL ("good") to LDL ("bad") cholesterol.

So I set myself the challenge of replacing coconut milk with something that would taste as close as possible to the original but decrease the saturated fat levels.

After much experimentation I landed on cashew milk made from fresh raw cashews, plus a bit of coconut extract added at the end. I hope you'll agree that these dishes have all the flavor appeal of Thai and Indian curries, with the added bonus of a cholesterol-friendly list of ingredients.



Massaman Thai Curry



Red Thai Curry



Yellow Thai Curry



Summer Squash & Chickpea Curry



Mushroom & Pea Creamy Masala

# Massaman Thai Curry

*This tastes like pure comfort food, with peanut butter, cashew milk, dates, and aromatic curry spicing. With 10 grams less fat and 12 grams less saturated fat than if made with coconut milk, this dish also gives you peace of mind.*

**Hands-on time:** 35 minutes

**Total time:** 40 minutes

**Makes:** 4 servings

Soak cashews in cold water at least 2 hours, or pour boiling water over them, cover, and let them soak 20 minutes. (You can skip this step if you have a high-speed blender.)

## 1/3 cup raw cashews

Drain and rinse the cashews (if you soaked them) and combine with the following ingredients in the blender. Blend until the cashews are dissolved. Set aside.

3 cups water

1-2 Tablespoons peanut butter

1 Tablespoon of Thai thin soy sauce (see page 8)

2 pitted dates or 1/2 Tablespoon brown sugar

1/2" piece of fresh ginger, peeled and grated

In a Dutch oven or other large pan, water-sauté the following ingredients in 1/4 cup water, until the vegetables start to get tender, about 5 minutes.

1 red bell pepper, seeds removed and sliced into 1/2 inch wide strips

1/2 white, yellow, or red onion, thinly sliced

1 carrot, thinly sliced

Add the curry paste into the vegetables and stir with a wooden spoon or silicone spatula on low for 3-5 minutes so that the curry paste cooks a bit. Add a little water if it burns.

## 1/4 cup Massaman curry paste (see page 8)

Stir in the following ingredients, bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 8 to 10 minutes, uncovered, until vegetables are tender but still have a little bit of firmness to them. Add a little more water if the sauce is too thick; cook a bit longer if the sauce is too thin.

## The cashew broth

(optional) 8 ounces baked tofu sliced into 1/4-inch thin strips \*

1 medium-large potato (any kind), cut into small cubes (peeling optional)

2 Tablespoons chopped roasted peanuts

## Sriracha sauce to taste

Remove from heat and add:

1 teaspoon coconut extract

Taste and season with more soy sauce if desired. Serve with hot rice and garnish with cilantro.

Steamed rice (Jasmin brown rice if possible)

Chopped fresh cilantro

## Nutritional information per serving (with baked tofu and 1/2 cup rice):

365 calories, 16g fat, 2g sat. fat, 42g carbs, 907mg sodium, 6mg fiber, 15g protein

\* See no-oil recipe for baked tofu on [www.graciousvegan.com](http://www.graciousvegan.com)

# Red Thai Curry

*Feel free to change up the vegetables in this speedy-to-make dish. You could add up to a couple cups of additional vegetables along with the zucchini—this would change the proportion of cashew broth to vegetables, but that's a direction I like. This classic dish can also be made spicier by using more red curry paste.*

**Hands-on time:** 25 minutes

**Total time:** 30 minutes

**Makes:** 4 servings

Soak cashews in cold water at least 2 hours, or pour boiling water over them, cover, and let them soak 20 minutes. (You can skip this step if you have a high-speed blender.)

**1/3 cup raw cashews**

Drain and rinse the cashews (if you soaked them) and combine with the following ingredients in the blender. Blend until the cashews are dissolved (from 30 seconds to several minutes). Set aside.

**3 cups water**

**1 Tablespoon lime juice**

**1 Tablespoon of Thai thin soy sauce (see page 8)**

**3 pitted dates or 2 teaspoons brown sugar**

In a Dutch oven or other large pan, water-sauté the peppers in 2 Tablespoons water, until the strips start to get tender, about 5 minutes.

**1 red bell pepper, sliced into 1/2-inch wide strips**

Add the curry paste and lime leaves into the vegetables and stir with a wooden spoon or silicone spatula on low for 3-5 minutes so that the curry paste cooks a bit. Add a little water if it begins to burn.

**2-4 (or more) Tablespoons red curry paste (see page 8)**

**4 kaffir lime leaves, fresh or frozen, or the peel from 1 lime (see page 8)**

Stir in the following ingredients, bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 8 to 10 minutes, uncovered, until vegetables are tender but still have a little bit of firmness to them. Add a little more water if the sauce is too thick; cook a bit longer if the sauce is too thin.

**The cashew broth**

**8 ounces baked tofu sliced into 1/4-inch thin strips \***

**2 small, slender zucchini, sliced into 1/2-inch wide strips**

**1/2 cup lightly packed Thai basil leaves, thinly sliced (see page 8)**

Remove from heat and add:

**1 teaspoon coconut extract**

Taste and season with more soy sauce or lime juice if desired. Serve with hot rice and garnish with cilantro.

**Steamed rice (Jasmine brown rice if possible)**

**Chopped fresh cilantro**

**Nutritional information per serving (with 1/2 cup rice):**

305 calories, 11g fat, 1 g sat. fat, 40g carbs, 914mg sodium, 6mg fiber, 12g protein

\* See no-oil recipe for baked tofu on [www.graciousvegan.com](http://www.graciousvegan.com)

# Yellow Thai Curry

*Each type of curry paste uses a different array of herbs and has its own character. Yellow curry paste is a medium hot mixture, not as spicy as red and green, but not as mellow as Massaman. This combination with potatoes, green beans, and peas hits all the right notes for a deeply satisfying dinner.*

**Hands-on time:** 45 minutes

**Total time:** 50 minutes

**Makes:** 5 servings

Soak cashews in cold water at least 2 hours, or pour boiling water over them, cover, and let them soak 20 minutes. (You can skip this step if you have a high-speed blender.)

**1/3 cup raw cashews**

Drain and rinse the cashews (if you soaked them) and combine with the following ingredients in the blender. Blend until the cashews are dissolved (from 30 seconds to several minutes). Set aside.

**2 cups water**

**2 pitted dates (or 2 teaspoons brown sugar)**

**1 Tablespoon cashew or peanut butter**

**1 teaspoon salt**

In a Dutch oven or other large pan, water-sauté the following ingredients for about 5 minutes, until they begin to get tender.

**1 medium onion, chopped**

**1 red bell pepper, diced**

**2 cloves garlic, minced**

Stir in curry paste. Cook 2-3 minutes, so that the paste cooks a bit.

**2-4 Tablespoons yellow curry paste (see page 8)**

Stir in all the other ingredients and simmer about 2-3 minutes, until the potatoes and green beans are tender.

**The cashew broth**

**1 pound red-skin or Yukon gold potatoes, cut into small dice (peeling optional)**

**1/2 pound green beans, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces**

Add final ingredients and cook 2 minutes more.

**1/2 cup thawed peas**

**2 Tablespoons thinly sliced Thai basil leaves (see page 8)**

**3 kaffir lime leaves or 1 Tablespoon lime juice (see page 8)**

**1 teaspoon coconut extract**

Garnish with cilantro and serve over rice.

**Steamed rice (Jasmine brown rice if possible)**

**Chopped fresh cilantro**

**Nutritional information per serving (with 1/2 cup rice):**

308 calories, 6g fat, 1g sat. fat, 57g carbs, 251mg sodium, 7mg fiber, 9g protein

# Summer Squash & Chickpea Curry

*This lovely Indian curry, with its smooth coconut-tomato base, is chock-full of tasty ingredients that happen to be good for you. I like to serve this with Baked Indian Fritters.*

**Hands-on time:** 30 minutes

**Total time:** 55 minutes

**Makes:** 6 servings

Soak cashews in cold water at least 2 hours, or pour boiling water over them, cover, and let them soak 20 minutes. (You can skip this step if you have a high-speed blender.)

**1/3 cup raw cashews**

Drain and rinse the cashews (if you soaked them) and blend them with the water until the cashews are dissolved (from 30 seconds to several minutes). Set aside.

**1.75 cups water**

Water-sauté the following ingredients in a Dutch oven or other large pan (start with 1/4 cup water and add more as needed.) Cook 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are just tender.

**2 cups diced onion**

**2 Tablespoons minced fresh ginger**

**3 cloves garlic, minced**

**1 medium eggplant, cut into 1/2-inch cubes (about 4 cups) (peeling optional)**

**1 medium yellow summer squash, cut into 1/2-inch cubes (around 1.5 cups)**

**1 large or two small zucchini, cut into 1/2-inch cubes (around 1.5 cups)**

**1 teaspoon salt**

Stir in the following ingredients and cook 1 to 2 more minutes.

**1 teaspoon garam masala**

**1/2 teaspoon ground coriander**

**1/2 teaspoon ground cumin**

**1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric**

**1/2 teaspoon siracha sauce (or to taste)**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

Add the following ingredients to the pot and stir.

**The cashew broth**

**One 15-ounce can chickpeas, drained and rinsed**

**One 16-ounce can tomato sauce or one 14-ounce can petite-dice tomatoes (your preference depending on the texture you'd like)**

**2 Tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro (see more needed below)**

Raise the heat to medium high and bring the curry to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the eggplant, squash, and zucchini are completely tender, and the sauce has thickened, 15 to 20 minutes. Add coconut extract.

**1 teaspoon coconut extract**

Serve the curry with rice and sprinkle with additional cilantro.

**Steamed rice (preferably brown basmati rice)**

**1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro**

**Nutritional information per serving (with 1/2 cup rice):** 285 calories, 4g fat, 1g sat. fat, 52g carbs, 876mg sodium, 10mg fiber, 10g protein

# Mushroom & Pea Creamy Masala

*This is a slight exception to the “coconut milk” rule. This type of masala stew is usually made with ground almonds, not coconut milk. I find that the cashews make it creamier. The fenugreek spice is important to the flavor of this dish, so go online or to a local Asian market. It’s worth it.*

**Hands-on time:** 40 minutes

**Total time:** 40 minutes

**Makes:** 5 servings

Soak cashews in cold water at least 2 hours, or pour boiling water over them, cover, and let them soak 20 minutes. (You can skip this step if you have a high-speed blender.)

**1/3 cups raw cashews**

**Vegetables.** Water-sauté these ingredients in a Dutch oven until the liquid released by the mushrooms is evaporated, anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes.

**1 pound button mushrooms, sliced (or chopped, if you prefer)**

**1 large onion, finely chopped**

**4 cloves garlic, minced, grated or finely chopped**

**2 Tablespoons minced fresh ginger**

Add the spices and stir 1-2 minutes.

**1/2 teaspoon garam masala**

**1/2 teaspoon paprika**

**1/2 teaspoon turmeric**

**1/2 teaspoon fenugreek seed or leaf powder**

**Cayenne pepper for spiciness (I used 1/8 teaspoon but some like it hotter)**

Add the green chili and cook 1-2 minutes.

**1 green chili (jalapeño or other, seeds removed or not), finely chopped**

**Creamy tomato sauce.** Separately, drain the cashews and place them in a blender with water and tomato paste and blend until the cashews are dissolved.

**1.75 cups water**

**1/2 cup tomato paste**

**Putting it all together.** Add the cashew-tomato mixture to the Dutch oven along with the peas and salt. Cover and simmer for 5 minutes. Add additional water to achieve a desired sauce consistency.

**1.5 cups peas (thawed or frozen)**

**1 teaspoon salt**

Garnish with cilantro and serve over rice.

**Steamed rice (basmati brown rice if possible)**

**Fresh chopped cilantro**

**Nutritional information per serving (with 1/2 cup rice):**

321 calories, 6g fat, 1g sat. fat, 55g carbs, 263mg sodium, 8g fiber, 12g protein

# Notes

## Thai thin soy sauce

When you dive into the world of soy sauces, you'll find out that there are a lot of them, from many regions of the world. When compared to the type of soy sauce you buy in mainstream grocery stores, Thai thin soy sauce is less salty and has less of an edge. The aftertaste is mild, even a bit sweet. I can definitely taste the difference.

Most Asian grocery stores will have Thai thin soy sauce, or you can buy it on Amazon or other online sites.

## Kaffir lime leaves

Kaffir lime trees, whose fruit is bitter and has bumpy skin, are not the same as the lime trees we're familiar with. The leaves have a wonderfully strong aroma and are used in Thai cooking similarly to how bay leaves are used in Western dishes.

It's worth seeking out kaffir lime leaves, because the resulting taste is very distinctive. They can be purchased fresh or frozen from Asian food stores in the produce or freezer section. The great thing is that they freeze well and a lot come in a single package; the frozen leaves will last you a long time.

## Thai basil

Thai basil is slightly spicier than regular Italian basil, and its leaves are usually thicker and maintain some of their shape when cooked. Italian basil can be substituted in Thai curries when necessary, but Thai basil is worth using for its taste and texture.

Many mainstream stores now carry fresh Thai basil in the herb section of the produce aisle. Asian grocery stores with Thai food sections carry it, of course. The leaves can be frozen (slice them and store in 1/4- or 1/2-cup portions).

## Curry pastes

While Indian curries generally rely on dry spices like coriander, turmeric, cumin, cardamom, black mustard and dried chilies, Thai curries contain more fresh herbs and chilies such as lemongrass, galangal, garlic, shallot, kaffir lime leaves, and cilantro stems.

For Thai curries, the fresh herbs and chilies are ground into a paste before being added to other ingredients. Many Thai cooks make their own curry pastes with a mortar and pestle. The rest of us rely on commercially sold pastes.

There are 5 types of curry pastes you should know about, from spiciest to mildest. Green curry paste is the hottest and contains more fresh green chilies than the others. Red curry paste relies on the power of red chilies. Yellow curry paste contains turmeric and curry powder. Penang curry paste uses red chilies like red curry paste, but is not as spicy. And Massaman curry paste is influenced by Indian flavors, with cardamom, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg often added to the basic Thai fresh herbs.

Some brands of curry paste use shrimp paste, so make sure you buy a brand that's vegan. Maesri brand is my favorite (I buy it in 4-can sets on Amazon), but I like Thai Kitchen as well.