

OPEN *Health*

# Spice Up Your Life With Turmeric!

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Next time you are perusing the grocery store shelves, pay attention to the ingredient listings for the following items: yellow cake mix, orange juice, Dijon mustard, biscuits, popcorn, cereal, sauces, gelatins, curry, yoghurt and canned beverages. Chances are that you will spot turmeric (also known as E100, Wiki/turmeric) in the ingredient lists.

Harvested from the perennial *Curcuma longa*, a relative of ginger, it is native to rainy South Asia where growers annually collect the plant's roots. After boiling and drying the roots, growers grind what's left to create a deep orange-yellow powder that is used to make curries, fabric dyes and food colouring.

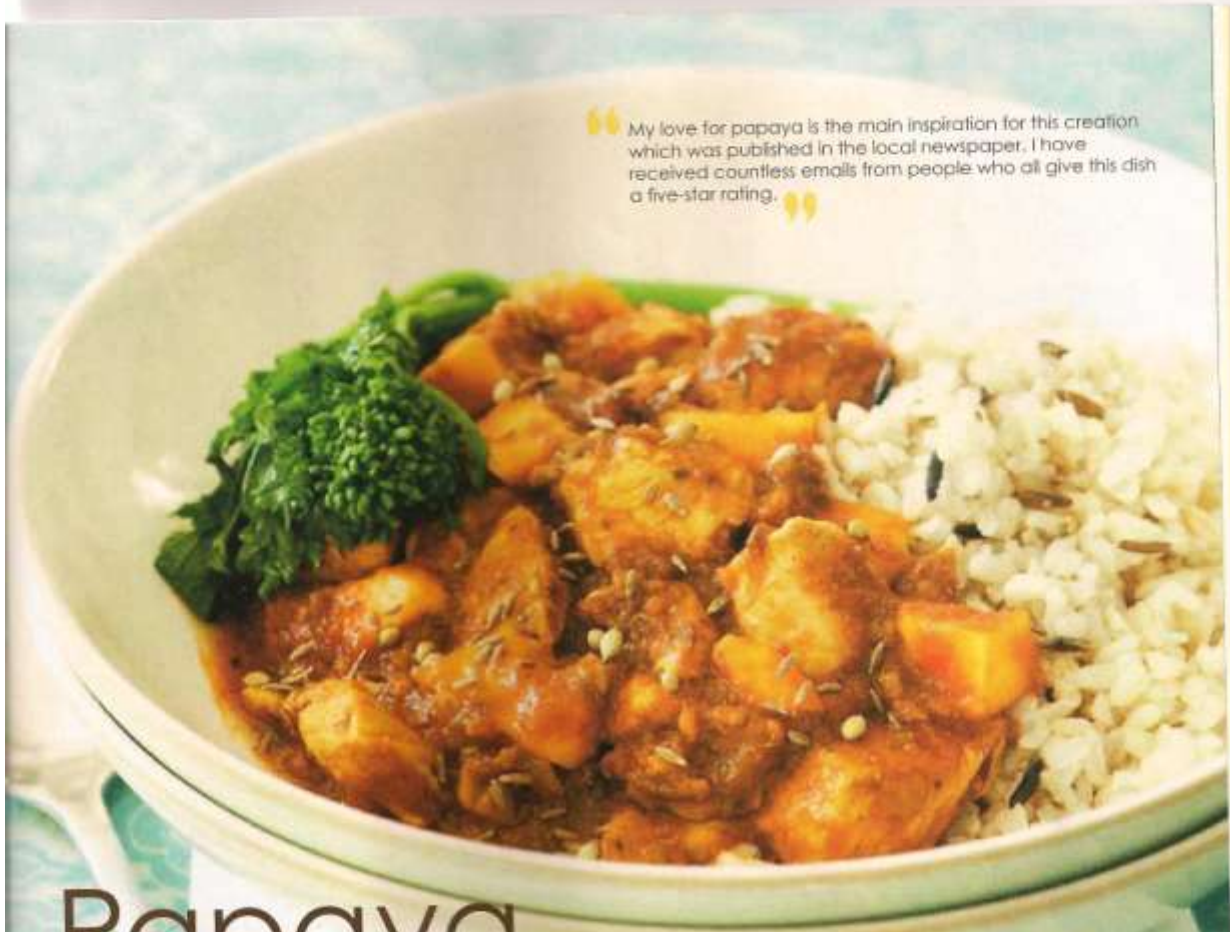
Some cultures use turmeric as medicine, creating an antiseptic for cuts or to soothe burns and bruises. Others use it as a dietary supplement to assist with pain and discomfort associated with stomach ailments. In 2006, the National Institutes of Health and the University Of Arizona College Of Medicine undertook a joint study of turmeric's effectiveness in treating inflammatory disorders such as arthritis. While animal testing showed marked effectiveness, human trials remain inconclusive and ongoing research and studies continue.

Canadian author Bal Arneson promotes the positives of cooking with turmeric in her new book, *Everyday Indian: 100 Fast, Fresh and Healthy Recipes* (Whitecap Books, North Vancouver, BC, 2009). In the book, Arneson hails the health benefits of turmeric and claims it "fights free radicals, protects the liver against toxins, aids circulation, lowers cholesterol levels, improves blood vessel health and has antibiotic and anti-inflammatory properties." Arneson shares a childhood story of how she broke her ankle while climbing a tree and as a remedy, her mother helped to soothe the swelling by creating a horrible tasting, yet effective, drink of milk and turmeric. Arneson recalls that this was a commonly used remedy for both internal and external maladies.

Arneson says there are all types of spices but turmeric remains her standby. So go ahead, do an inventory check of your spice cupboard and remember to discard any spices that you've had around for a while as spices lose their flavour over time. Can't find turmeric among your spices? Then add this rich and vibrant spice to your grocery list and begin to enjoy the aroma, colour and potential health benefits that this golden exotic spice has to offer.

The following is a recipe from Arneson's new book. ●

“My love for papaya is the main inspiration for this creation which was published in the local newspaper. I have received countless emails from people who all give this dish a five-star rating.”



# Papaya Chicken

- 2 Tbsp grapeseed oil
- 1 tsp fenugreek seeds
- ½ tsp asafoetida
- 2 Tbsp grated garlic
- 1 Tbsp grated ginger
- 1 green chili, finely chopped
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 Tbsp cumin seeds
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- ½ tsp ground cardamom
- ½ tsp Spanish paprika
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 lb boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut in small cubes
- ¼ cup low-fat plain yogurt
- 1 cup cubed, ripe, juicy papaya

Place the oil, fenugreek seeds, and asafoetida in a non-stick skillet over medium heat and cook for 10 seconds. Add the garlic, ginger and green chili, and cook for 2 minutes, stirring occasionally. Increase the heat to medium-high, add the onion and sauté for 4 minutes until caramelized. Add the whole cumin seeds, ground cumin, coriander, turmeric, cardamom, paprika and salt and cook for 10 seconds.

Add the chicken and cook until it's almost done, about 8 minutes. Stir in the yogurt and cook until the chicken is fully done, another 2 minutes. Add the papaya chunks and remove from the heat. Serve over rice or with naan (page 23) or plain rotis (page 20).

**Note:** I like to cook with free-range, non-medicated chicken; not only for health reasons but also for the better flavour.  
Serves 4