

Masala Chai Concentrate

A richly spiced chai concentrate sweetened with condensed milk, designed for effortless preparation. Yields 12 servings of 8 oz chai when diluted 1:1 with hot water or milk. The concentrate stores refrigerated for up to 2 weeks, offering the convenience of café-quality chai at home in moments.

Ingredients

Water	5 cups	Star anise	3 whole
Green cardamom pods	20	Black tea, loose leaf	5 Tbsp.
Fresh ginger root	3-inch knob	Sweetened condensed milk	21 oz.
Cinnamon sticks	2 (3-inch)	Granulated sugar	1/3 cup
Black peppercorns	12		
Whole cloves	6		
Fennel seeds	1 1/2 tsp.		

Directions

Crush **cardamom pods** and set aside in *Small Bowl #1* — Slice **ginger** into thin rounds and set aside in *Small Bowl #2* — Break **cinnamon sticks** into smaller pieces and combine with **peppercorns, cloves, fennel seeds,** and **star anise** in *Medium Bowl #1* (whole spices) — Measure **black tea** and set aside in *Small Bowl #3* — Have **condensed milk** and **sugar** ready in *Medium Bowl #2*

1. In a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven, add crushed **cardamom pods** (*Small Bowl #1*), **ginger** (*Small Bowl #2*), and **whole spices** (*Medium Bowl #1*). Toast over *medium heat* for *2-3 minutes*, stirring frequently, until fragrant and spices begin to release their oils. Do not allow spices to burn.
2. Add 5 cups **water** to the toasted spices. Increase heat to high and bring to a rolling boil. Once boiling, reduce heat to *medium-low* and maintain a steady simmer for *20 minutes*, stirring occasionally. The liquid should reduce by approximately 3/4 cup due to evaporation, concentrating the spice flavors.
3. Remove saucepan from heat. Immediately add 5 Tbsp. **black tea** (*Small Bowl #3*) to the hot spiced water. Stir gently to submerge all tea leaves, cover with lid, and steep for exactly *5 minutes*. Do not steep longer to avoid bitterness.

Masala Chai Concentrate

4. While tea steeps, prepare a fine-mesh strainer or cheesecloth-lined strainer over a large heat-proof bowl or measuring cup. After *5 minutes*, strain the concentrate through the prepared strainer, pressing firmly on the solids with the back of a spoon to extract maximum liquid. Discard solids. You should have approximately 4 to 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups of strained tea concentrate.
5. Return the strained tea concentrate to the saucepan (wiped clean if needed). Place over *medium heat* and add $\frac{1}{3}$ cup **sugar**. Stir continuously until sugar is completely dissolved, about *2 minutes*.
6. Reduce heat to *medium-low*. Gradually add 21 oz. **condensed milk** (*Medium Bowl #2*) in a steady stream while stirring constantly to prevent scorching. Continue stirring until the condensed milk is fully integrated into the tea base, creating a smooth, uniform concentrate.
7. Once integrated, increase heat slightly to bring the mixture just to the edge of a simmer—small bubbles should appear around the edges but mixture should not reach a full boil. Maintain this gentle simmer for *2-3 minutes*, stirring constantly, to ensure complete emulsification. The concentrate should be smooth and creamy with no separation.
8. Remove from heat and allow concentrate to cool to room temperature, approximately *45 minutes to 1 hour*. Stir occasionally during cooling to prevent skin formation.
9. Once cooled, transfer concentrate to clean glass bottles or jars using a funnel. Seal tightly and refrigerate immediately. The concentrate will thicken slightly as it cools.
10. To serve: Mix 4 oz. ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) **chai concentrate** with 4 oz. ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) hot water or steamed milk. Stir well and serve immediately. Adjust ratio to taste—use more concentrate for stronger chai, more liquid for milder flavor.

Equipment Required

- Large heavy-bottomed saucepan or 4-quart Dutch oven
- Fine-mesh strainer or cheesecloth
- Large heat-proof bowl or 8-cup measuring cup
- Wooden spoon or heat-resistant silicone spatula
- Small prep bowls (3)
- Medium prep bowls (2)
- Funnel
- Glass bottles or jars with tight-fitting lids (6-8 cups total capacity)
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Mortar and pestle or heavy knife for crushing cardamom

Mise en Place

- Small Bowl #1 — crushed **cardamom pods** (20 pods)
- Small Bowl #2 — sliced **ginger** (3-inch knob, thin rounds)
- Small Bowl #3 — **black tea** (5 Tbsp. loose leaf)
- Medium Bowl #1 — whole spices: broken **cinnamon sticks**, 12 **peppercorns**, 6 **cloves**, 1½ tsp. **fennel seeds**, 3 **star anise**
- Medium Bowl #2 — 21 oz. **condensed milk** (1½ standard 14-oz. cans) and ⅓ cup **sugar**
- Have 5 cups **water** measured and ready

Ingredient Tips

- **Green cardamom pods:** Use fresh, plump pods that feel slightly heavy. Avoid pre-ground cardamom as it loses potency quickly. Crush pods just enough to crack them open and expose seeds.
- **Fresh ginger:** Choose firm, unwrinkled ginger with tight skin. No need to peel if thoroughly washed. Slicing into thin rounds maximizes surface area for extraction.
- **Black tea:** Assam CTC (Crush-Tear-Curl) is ideal for authentic flavor and proper strength. Darjeeling works but is more delicate. English Breakfast is acceptable. Avoid Earl Grey (bergamot conflicts with spices).
- **Tea bags alternative:** Use 14-16 standard black tea bags if loose leaf unavailable. Remove after steeping to prevent over-extraction.

- **Star anise:** Use whole star anise, not broken pieces or ground. Contributes subtle licorice notes without overpowering.
- **Fennel seeds:** Adds sweet, slightly anise-like complexity. Use whole seeds, not ground.
- **Condensed milk:** Sweetened condensed milk only (not evaporated milk). Brand matters less than freshness—check expiration date.
- **Spice quality:** Whole spices from bulk bins or specialty stores are fresher than jarred supermarket spices. Store whole spices in airtight containers away from light.

Preparation Tips

- **Toasting spices:** Watch carefully and stir constantly. Spices can burn quickly, which creates bitter flavors. They should smell fragrant and warm, not smoky.
- **Simmering time:** The 20-minute simmer is critical for full spice extraction. Rushing this step produces weak, one-dimensional flavor.
- **Tea steeping:** Set a timer for exactly 5 minutes. Over-steeped tea becomes astringent and bitter, especially when concentrated.
- **Straining thoroughly:** Press firmly on solids to extract every drop of flavored liquid. The yield difference between casual straining and thorough pressing is significant.
- **Emulsification technique:** Adding **condensed milk** gradually while stirring prevents separation. The gentle simmer at the end ensures stable emulsion.
- **Avoiding boiling after milk addition:** Full boiling can cause **condensed milk** proteins to separate or scorch. Keep at gentle simmer only.
- **Cooling before bottling:** Hot concentrate transferred directly to bottles can crack glass and creates condensation that promotes spoilage.

Make Ahead & Storage

- Concentrate stores refrigerated for up to 2 weeks in clean, airtight glass containers
- Always use clean utensils when portioning concentrate to prevent contamination
- Concentrate will thicken when cold—this is normal; shake or stir before using
- Check for signs of spoilage before using: off smell, separation that doesn't resolve with stirring, mold, or sour taste

Masala Chai Concentrate

- For extended storage, freeze concentrate in ice cube trays (2 oz. portions), then transfer cubes to freezer bags. Frozen concentrate keeps 3 months. Thaw cubes in refrigerator overnight.
- Label bottles with preparation date for easy tracking
- Spices can be toasted and stored separately in airtight container for 1 week if you want to streamline future batches

Serving Suggestions

- **Classic chai latte:** Mix 4 oz. concentrate with 4 oz. steamed whole milk or oat milk
- **Simple hot chai:** Mix 4 oz. concentrate with 4 oz. hot water (the **condensed milk** already provides creaminess)
- **Iced chai:** Mix 4 oz. concentrate with 4 oz. cold milk over ice; stir well
- **Stronger chai:** Use 5 oz. concentrate with 3 oz. liquid
- **Milder chai:** Use 3 oz. concentrate with 5 oz. liquid
- **Dirty chai:** Add 1-2 shots espresso to prepared chai for coffee-chai hybrid
- Garnish with ground cinnamon, freshly grated nutmeg, or star anise for presentation
- Pair with biscotti, shortbread, or traditional Indian snacks like samosas or pakoras
- For special occasions, top with frothed milk and dust with cardamom-cinnamon blend
- Concentrate also works as flavoring for baked goods, ice cream base, or overnight oats