



Food from up north

GARHWALI CUISINE In Garhwal, food is wholesome, organic and season-driven. **Preeti Verma Lal** gets a taste of this wondrous treat made from often obscure ingredients



If you are ever in Garhwal, never say no to scorpion. Scorpion grass, actually. Be careful, do not fall on it. You'll itch for life. But if it is on your dinner plate, dig in. Are you imagining scorpion for meal? Banish the thought. This is no tale of a scorpion. *Bichhu ghaas* (literally, scorpion grass) is a highly nutritious Garhwali leafy green. And yes, the raw leaves do sting like scorpions — the leaves are boiled and tempered with *jakhya* as a traditional accompaniment for rice and *roti*. That's how I was initiated into Garhwali cuisine. With a scorpion grass in Ananda in the Himalayas, a wellness resort perched 1,150 metres above sea level. Chef Arun Kala had laid a Garhwali *thali* for lunch — *mandua* (finger millet) *roti*, *gahat dal* (horse gram pulse), *patod* (fritters made of colocasia leaves), *kadhi*, *pahadi* potato curry, *jhangora* (*sanwa/samvat ke chawal* in Hindi and *kuthiravaali* or *kudirai valu* in Tamil) *kheer*. Unfamiliar ingredient names were flying in frosty air and Chef Arun began with the basics of Garhwali cuisine.

“Remember, *jakhya*. It is ubiquitous in a Garhwali home. Every dish is tempered with *jakhya*, which belongs to the mustard family but is more pungent and smaller than the black mustard.” In the mountains grow ancient grains like *jhangora* (barnyard millet), which is packed with minerals (one of the highest value amongst grains), phosphorous and calcium. A versatile grain, it lends itself to various preparations including the festive *jhangora kheer* and a *kadhi* called *jhangora ka chencheda*. High in energy, *jhangora* is a perfect fasting food and a sustenance choice for Garhwali women who toil in hilly terraced fields. To learn more about Garhwali cuisine, Chef Arun and his team explored the neighbouring villages and found a few foodie gems. Like, *gahat*, a local lentil that is godsend for winter months and is said to be miraculous for kidney stones. *Gahat* can be cooked as regular *dal*, or stuffed in *mandua roti*. *Gahat* is also mixed with toor dal to make *kashere ki dal*, which borrows its name from the copper utensil (*kashere*) in which it is cooked. *Patod* is a

common snack. Made of colocasia leaves slathered with *besan* (gram flour) batter, it is steamed and deep fried. *Mandua*, not wheat, is a staple grain for *rotis*. The thick brown *rotis* are consumed with *ghee*. In Garhwal, it is almost mandatory to give *mandua halwa* to lactating mothers. Chef Arun categorises Garhwali cuisine as predominantly vegetarian. Meat eaters prefer mutton to other meats, with seafood almost non-existent in the kitchen. One of the traditional non-vegetarian preparations is the *kachmauli*, where a goat is smoked in open fire with leaves and seasoned. The flesh is taken off the bone and daubed with mustard oil before being served. *Ghee* and mustard oil are the most common cooking mediums.

And for dessert... For the sweet-toothed, there's *arsa*, *bal mithai* and *singhauri* (*singore*). Ask any Garhwali and they will tell you the importance of *bal mithai*, a sweet made of *khoya* (evaporated milk) cooked in sugarcane juice until dark brown. It is then cooled, cut into cubes and wrapped in sugar crystals. *Bal mithai* is so synonymous with Garhwal that efforts are on to get a GI (Geographical Indication) for this sweet. *Arsa*, made of rice powder and jaggery is a festive treat, traditionally given to brides when they came home after the wedding. *Arsa* is always packed for her for the journey back to her in-laws' home. But the most intriguing one, perhaps, is *singhauri* (cardamom-flavoured *khoya*) wrapped in sal leaf cones. In Garhwal, food is wholesome, organic and season-driven. Here, not every thing is eaten every time. In Ananda, I looked at the traditional *thali* again. I was no longer deciphering the ingredients, I was counting the million nutrients packed in the scrumptious lunch. A bulbul hopped by my table. Did she want a nutritious Garhwali lunch, too? I wondered.

Recipes

Garhwal colocasia patod (Serves 8)

Ingredients
Colocasia leaves (5 number), 250 gm gram flour, 5 gm turmeric, 5 gm red chilli powder, 10 gm cumin powder, 100 ml water, salt to taste. For tempering: 100 gm onion (sliced), 10 g *jakhya* (Himalayan mustard), 30 ml refined oil.

Method
Make a batter of gram flour, salt, turmeric, red chilli powder, cumin powder and water. Apply this on the colocasia leaves and roll them into a loaf. Steam the loaf and keep for overnight chilling. Make slices, fry and temper with sautéed onions and *jakhya*. Serve hot.

Kashere ki dal

Ingredients
30 gm *gahat* lentil, 30 gm *toor dal*, 10 ml refined oil, 5 gm garlic, ½ tbsp *jakhya*, 2 whole red chillies, 1 tsp *ghee*, ½ tsp coriander powder, ¼ tsp turmeric powder, ½ tsp coriander leaves, salt to taste.

Method
Boil both the lentils together until cooked. Heat oil in a pan add whole red chillies and *jakhya*. Add chopped garlic. Now add all powdered spices. Add the boiled lentils, and then add *ghee* to it. Garnish with coriander. Serve hot.

Recipes courtesy: Chef Arun Kala, Ananda in the Himalayas



DELIGHTS The Garhwali delicacy *Patod* (left) and some local herbs. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR