

Novice In The Kitchen

Tania's
Culinary
Adventures
Volume 1



By Kanika G

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Tania loves cooking. She helped Mama make pancakes, when she was only 3 years old. Over the years she has helped Mama create a number of nutritious, wholesome, tasty masterpieces.

But masterpieces are not easy to create. A lot can go wrong along the way. There is an engaging story behind each recipe, as Tania learns the many little things that have to be just so to make a recipe a success. Read on to be entertained and then and you can try them out with the help of your favourite grown up.

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Sticky Goo In The Microwave: Bread Pudding For Breakfast

One Sunday morning, Tania woke up grumpy. Mama asked her what she wanted for breakfast, but Tania just sulked, sitting on the corner of the sofa.

"Would you like to help me make bread pudding for breakfast? " Mama called out from the kitchen trying to cheer her up.

"I love bread pudding." Tania shot off the sofa and made a bee line for the kitchen. "But won't it take a long time to make?"

"Not if my idea works. You know the [chocolate mug cake we make](#) in the microwave?"

"Yes. You use ground oats instead of flour, that makes the cake very fluffy. I love that cake." Tania smacked her lips.

"I think we can make bread pudding, in a mug, in the microwave too."

"That is a great breakfast idea. I can have my egg, bread and milk all in one tasty, easy to make, pudding. Sounds yummy."

Mama smiled. "Don't get too excited. Let's see how it turns out."

Here is the list of ingredients:

- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 tablespoon castor sugar
- 1 slice of whole wheat brown bread
- 1 tea spoon vanilla essence
- 1 teaspoon butter

If you want it chocolate flavoured, leave out the butter above, and use the following to make a chocolate paste:

- 1 teaspoon butter
- 2 teaspoons cocoa powder
- 1 and 1/2 teaspoon castor sugar

Mama fetched a large ceramic coffee mug. Tania took out a loaf of brown bread, an egg and the milk carton from the refrigerator. Tania cracked the egg on the side of the mug and put it in. Then Mama added the milk, sugar and vanilla essence, while Tania tore up the slice of bread into little pieces.

Tania vigorously beat the mixture in the mug with a fork to make it frothy. Then she dropped in the bread pieces, one by one, and let them soak for half a minute. Again she stirred the mixture with a fork till all the bread was blended in to a smooth batter.

Mama was about to put the mug in the microwave and later spread the butter on the hot pudding, but Tania had an idea.

"Mama can we make it chocolate flavoured? Please ..."

I suppose we could. Let's try it out. Mama melted the butter in the microwave and mixed in the cocoa and sugar to make a thick chocolate paste. Tania poured the chocolate paste in to the mug with the batter and stirred the whole thing together with the fork again.

Tania put the mug in the microwave for 2 minutes. Mama and Tania watched the already firm pudding rise an inch above the top of the mug. Tania recalled, that they had used a smaller, tea cup to make the chocolate mug cake, the first time, and the batter had overflowed and made a big sticky mess in the microwave. Since then Mama always used this large mug, to make cakes in the microwave

Soon the bread pudding was ready and Tania was enjoying a delicious breakfast. It was so tasty, that Sonia ran off with a couple of pieces from her plate. Tania's mouth was stuffed, so she could not speak, but her frown was quite eloquent. Mama laughed. "Don't worry Tania. I'll make another one in a jiffy for Sonia, and you can take some from her."

Sonia Has An Accident: Strawberry Yoghurt For Dessert

Tania loves yoghurt. Mama makes it at home everyday, and Tania has a bowl full after dinner every night. When Tania was a baby, grandma gave Mama, her secret recipe for strawberry yoghurt. During strawberry season in spring, when it is already quite hot in Bombay, Tania enjoys this refreshing and delicious, yet healthy dessert. She insists it is nicer than strawberries and cream, because the yoghurt gives it a tangy flavour.

Tania has learned to make it on her own with a little help from Mama. As soon as Mama brings strawberries home from the market, Tania gets to work. Strawberries don't last very long, but fresh strawberries are just heavenly. Tania gathers together the ingredients. Here is the list.

- Fresh yoghurt made from 1 litre of milk (The yoghurt should be refrigerated as soon as it sets, to prevent it from getting sour)
- 1 or 2 tablespoons castor sugar (as per taste)
- 24 fresh strawberries
- 1 pomegranate

Mama took out the pomegranate seeds. Tania tried to help her, but it was more difficult than it looked, and Tania squirted herself with magenta pomegranate juice, that later turned purple. Thank goodness she always wore an apron in

the kitchen! So her pretty yellow dress was spared.

Tania washed the strawberries thoroughly with drinking water and cut off the leafy green tops. Mama cut the bigger strawberries in to 8 pieces each, and Tania cut the smaller ones in to 6 pieces each.

Tania vigorously mixed the yoghurt and the sugar. Then Mama added in the pomegranate seeds and chopped strawberries, and Tania gently mixed in the fruit. The yoghurt was now a lovely, bright pink colour.

Tania and Mama left the strawberry yoghurt to chill in the refrigerator. After dinner, she helped Mama serve it in the dessert bowls. It was delicious.

Sonia did not like yoghurt, so she was eating chocos, a chocolaty cereal, for dessert. She accidentally dropped some of her chocos in to Tania's dessert bowl, when she tripped over her blocks.

The chocos gave the dessert a chocolaty taste and a nice crunch. It was the perfect topping. Tania sprinkled some chocos on Mama's and papa's strawberry yoghurt too. Everyone loved it.

The next time Tania visited grandma, she told her the story of Sonia adding chocos to the strawberry yoghurt recipe. "Accidents often result in the best discoveries." Grandma said sagely and wrote down Tania's tweak in her recipe book. Grandma's secret recipe just got a whole lot better.

Exploding Mixers: Spaghetti For Dinner

Tania was fed up with roti, dal and vegetables for dinner everyday. She longed for a change. She asked "Mama, can we have something more interesting for dinner tonight?"

Mama thought for a moment. "I have some spaghetti, I have been planning to make for sometime. We could cook it together."

"Yes! Yes, yes. I love to help with cooking. So what do I do?"

Here is the list of ingredients:

- 5 large tomatoes
- 250 grams whole wheat spaghetti
- 3 small cloves of garlic
- 1 teaspoon butter
- Salt to taste (can be added later if it is less)
- 1 teaspoon powdered or freshly ground pepper

Mama was rummaging through the kitchen cupboard for a large saucepan. "Please get five large tomatoes from the fridge." She said to Tania. "We need to boil them."

Mama filled the saucepan with water. Tania put the tomatoes in, and Mama set them to boil. As they waited for the tomatoes to boil Tania asked, "Mama, why are we boiling whole tomatoes?"

"After a tomato boils for a few minutes, its skin splits. Then it is easy to peel. We put the peeled tomatoes in the mixer and make a smooth purée. The skin is too fibrous and does not blend well in the purée. That is why, we take it out." Mama let the tomatoes boil for a few minutes and then turned off the stove. She poured out most of the hot water.

As they waited for the tomatoes to cool, Sonia woke up from her nap. Sonia needed her diaper changed, so Mama was taking some time. Tania was getting impatient. She decided to proceed without Mama.

Mama walked in to the kitchen after putting Sonia in clean a diaper and was shocked to see a horrifying mess. "What happened Tania? Are you all right?"

There was tomato pulp sprayed all over the kitchen and Tania was covered in it. Fortunately, the tomato pulp was not hot enough to cause Tania any burns.

"Mama, I peeled the tomatoes and put them in in the mixer, and soon after I pressed the button to make a purée, it exploded." Tania was bamboozled.

Now that Mama had established that Tania was not hurt, the sight of Tania dripping tomato pulp from her hair and nose, with an expression of utter bewilderment, made her helplessly giggle. Tania saw a reflection of herself on the shiny fridge door and burst our laughing too.

"But what happened Mama? I don't understand? What did I

do wrong?"

"This mixer can handle about two tomatoes at a time. If the tomatoes are large, hot and steamy, then may be, only one. I am guessing you put them all in together." Tania nodded and Mama smiled.

Then Mama explained, "The mixer works by churning its contents, so they move outward and upward. With runny liquids, like the blended tomatoes, if it is more than one third full, the liquid rises and pushes the cap off. If the liquid has a a thicker, paste-like, consistency, like hummus, you can safely make it half full."

"Okay, I'll remember that next time." Tania went to the bathroom and washed up, while Mama set another two tomatoes to boil. She puréed the partially blended tomatoes, that were left in the mixer, a little at a time. Mama supervised as Tania puréed the last couple of tomatoes carefully, one at a time. This time she succeeded, without exploding anything.

Mama had already set a large pot of water to boil. When the water started boiling, Mama and Tania put the spaghetti in to the water and added a teaspoon of salt. They waited for the water to reach boiling point again. Then Tania simmered the stove. The spaghetti would take 13 minutes to cook.

In the mean time, Tania put the butter in to a microwavable bowl, and Mama minced some garlic. Tania added the minced garlic to the bowl and put it in the microwave for 15

seconds. When she took it out, the garlic was sizzling in the butter and it smelled so good. Tania poured the garlic butter mixture in to the tomato purée, added salt and stirred it with a ladle.

When the spaghetti was cooked, Mama drained out the water. Mama thought it was dangerous for Tania to try to drain out the boiling hot water herself, and Tania agreed. Once the water was drained, Tania added the puréed tomato mixture to the spaghetti and stirred it. She waited for it to boil, stirring intermittently. Then she simmered the stove and stirred with a ladle for another couple of minutes and voilà, the spaghetti was ready. Mama sprinkled some freshly ground pepper on top.

It does smell delicious. I wonder if Tania will invite me for dinner...

Glue In My Tummy: Sabudana Khichadi After School

When Tania is back from school, she likes to have a snack. Mama got the recipe for sabudana khichadi from Tanisha's mother. Here is the list of ingredients:

- 1 cup sabudana, also known as sago



- 1/3 cup roasted peanuts
- 1 lemon
- 1/2 teaspoon cumin powder
- 1/2 teaspoon coriander powder
- Few cumin seeds
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

- Salt to taste (can be added later if it is less)

Mama put the sabudana to soak overnight in some water. The next day, when Tania returned from school, she freshened up and then joined Mama in the kitchen to help her make the sabudana khichadi

Tania was now quite adept at using the mixer. So she coarsely ground the roasted peanuts. Mama drained the excess water from the soaked sabudana and put the olive oil to heat, in a wok on the stove top.

Tania put in the cumin seeds. She liked the sound of the cumin crackling in the hot oil. Then Mama added the sabudana and sautéed it.

Unfortunately, the sabudana was becoming a sticky gooey mess. Mama sprinkled some salt and the cumin powder, and Tania added in the ground peanuts hoping some of the stickiness would disappear. But she had no such luck.

Papa was working from home that day. He came to investigate the enticing aromas from the kitchen, but once he saw the scary sticky mess in the wok, he made some excuse and returned to work. Mama heard him mumble something about a hazardous concoction, on his way out.

Mama added the lemon, but the mixture was impossible to stir. Tania added the coriander garnish and tasted some. She said it tasted okay, but the texture was awful. She could not manage to swallow more than a couple of spoons full.

That evening, Mama went to Tanisha's house and told her mother about the disaster. "I have no idea what went wrong." She said sadly.

Tanisha's mother replied, "I think I know what happened. I should have mentioned that you need to soak one cup of sabudana in exactly one cup of water. Any extra water, and it will be come a sticky mess. I am so sorry I forgot to specify that. You see I make this so often, I just take it for granted." She said apologetically. "I promise you, if you use the right amount of water to soak the sabudana, this is a really easy snack to make. Just try it once more." She pleaded.

"Okay I'll try once more. I don't like giving up easily."

Tania's mother returned home and carefully soaked one cup of sabudana in exactly one cup of water.

When she wanted to cook it the next day, the sabudana looked much drier than she had expected, but she decided to trust Tanisha's mother. Tania and Mama followed the same procedure they had on the previous day. This time the sabudana khichadi turned out perfect, with each of the pearls of sabudana well separated, soft and fluffy.



Tania, Mama and Sonia enjoyed the lovely hot snack. Mama called up Tanisha's mother and thanked her for the recipe. Tanisha's mother was relieved that everything had turned out so well this time.



Play Dough Fun: Sharing Shondesh With Friends

One Sunday afternoon Tania, Tanisha, Karishma and Sonali were playing *Pictionary* at Tania's house. After about an hour, they got tired of the game. Tania asked Mama if they could eat something. Mama could tell that the girls were bored too. So she came up with an idea. "How would you girls like to make shondesh?"

"Shondesh? What is that?" Tanisha looked puzzled.

Shondesh is a Bengali sweet made from [paneer or chenna](#).

"But we don't have any paneer in the house Mama." Tania reminded her.

"I know. So, we make it" Mama smiled and her eyes glinted.
"That is half the fun."

Here is a list of ingredients for making shondesh

- 1 litre of milk
- 1 lemon
- 500 grams of date palm jaggery

"Make it? How do we make it?" Karishma was intrigued.

"I'll show you. You can help. Tanisha, dear, could you get a carton of milk from the refrigerator? And Tania please get

the yellow muslin cloth in my cupboard." Mama said, as she got a large aluminium vessel from the kitchen cabinet.

"Sonali, you'll find lemons on the left side of the second shelf of the fridge. Could you get one and cut it in to 4 pieces? And Karishma, please pour the milk into this vessel." Mama set the milk to boil on the stove top and handed each girl a piece of lemon.

Once the milk was boiling properly, Mama turned off the stove and asked the girls to squeeze the juice out of the lemon pieces straight in to the boiling hot milk, one by one. Tanisha did it first, and everyone noticed the milk was starting to curdle. As they added more lemon, more of the milk curdled.

"Why does that happen Mama?" Tania asked unable to take her eyes off the fascinating sight of the slowly curdling milk. After a few minutes, all of the milk curdled. The girls could clearly see the white curdled chunks lying in the yellowish water.

"Milk contains bits of fat dispersed in water, that has proteins and carbohydrates dissolved in it. The protein is present in the form of tightly rolled up chains. Lemon had citric acid in it. When we add lemon to the milk, the acid causes the protein chains unravel and the proteins all get entangled with each other and form these white clumps that separate from the rest of the milk. That is what you are seeing here. The process happens faster if the milk is hot." Mama explained.

Mama draped the muslin cloth over the top of a large vessel and slowly pored all the curdled milk. The curdled chunks were neatly caught in the cloth, and the yellowish water went through. Then Mama brought the 4 corners of the cloth together and tied a knot to make a bundle with the curdled chunks of milk weighing it down.

She then tied another knot around the tap and let the bundle hang, while it dripped in to the sink. Initially there was a continuous stream of water dripping down and then drops with decreasing frequency.

But the girls were not bored while they waited, because Mama had another job for them. Mama gave each girl a large chunk of date palm jaggery to mash up.

By the time the girls were done, the water had drained out of the curdled milk. They could tell, because no more drops of water fell from the bundle. Mama said, "To make firm paneer we would have to keep it under something heavy for a couple of hours, so the last bits of water drain out." Mama took out the curdled milk and looked satisfied. "But this is good enough for making shondesh."

She divided the curdled milk in to 4 parts and gave one part to each girl. She told them to knead it, till it became like a dough. This was energy consuming, but lots of fun. Then the girls added in some of the mashed up jaggery and kneaded the mixture some more.

"Okay now what do we do?" Sonali enquired.

"Taste it, to see if it is sweet enough." Mama replied

"Mine is awesome." Tanisha looked delighted.

"Mine needs to be sweeter" Tania said thoughtfully.

"Then add some more jaggery and knead it all together." Mama suggested.

"I like that it has a faint lemon flavour." Karishma noted after tasting her mixture a couple of times.

"Yeah me too." Mama nodded. "That is why I prefer using lemon. Some people use vinegar instead."

Tanisha and Sonali waited, while Tania and Karishma added more jaggery to their dough. Finally once everyone was happy with the sweetness of the dough Mama said,

"Traditionally shondesh is served in ball, disc or conch shell shapes and sometimes cubes. But you can think of it as play dough and make your favourite shape. It is a little more crumbly than play dough though, so choose simple shapes."

"Can we use the shape cutter from the play dough set? "
Sonali asked hopefully.

"That is a great idea Sonali." Mama thoroughly washed the shape cutters from the play dough set and the girls spent the afternoon making butterfly, flower, crescent moon, star and tree shaped shondesh.

Soon it was tea time. The girls enjoyed eating their shondesh with some buttered toast, that Mama served, as they chatted and giggled together.