

I. SPICES AND CONDIMENTS:

This section includes recipes for spices or spice combinations that form an essential component of a number of the dishes below. A general rule with regard to spices is that they have a limited shelf life – the longer a spice sits unused, the less potent will be its flavor and smell. The attenuation of spices through age is especially pronounced when the spice is ground. Rachel always buys whole spices and grinds them herself, which produces an incomparable fragrance and taste. Although it is certainly acceptable to buy the spices pre-ground, it is recommended that they be ground at home. With regard to storage over time, spices – whether whole or ground – will keep longer when stored in an airtight container in a freezer. Always store spices in this fashion. They will still lose their smell and flavor over time, but at a far slower rate.

1. *Bharat*

“*Bharat*”, which means “spice mixture”, is the basic spice combination used to flavor some of the most well known Iraqi dishes. Each Iraqi family has its own proportions for combining the same seven spices, giving each version of *Bharat* a distinctive flavor. This is the Rachel’s recipe, which produces a wonderfully aromatic and flavorful mixture.

Rachel recommends that you make a larger quantity of *Bharat*, which should be stored in an airtight glass jar in a freezer. However, if you wish to make a smaller quantity, teaspoons may be substituted for tablespoons. It is best to buy the spices whole and grind them yourself, which produces by far the best flavor. Note: if you buy the rose buds whole, make sure to prepare them by removing the green stems before grinding.

3 tablespoons (2 teaspoons) cinnamon, coarsely ground
3 tablespoons (1 teaspoon) cardamom, coarsely ground (add more if smell weak)
2 ½ tablespoons (¾ teaspoon) of ginger, coarsely ground
2 ½ tablespoons (1 teaspoon) nutmeg, coarsely ground
1 tablespoon (½ teaspoon) cloves, coarsely ground
2 tablespoons (¾ teaspoon) allspice, coarsely ground
3 tablespoons (2 teaspoons) of rose buds, coarsely ground

2. *Numi Basra* (“Lemon of Basra”)

A spice often used in Iraqi cuisine is the coarse black grounds of “Numi Basra” or “Lemon of Basra”. Sometimes called “Persian lemons” or “black limes”, this tangy spice is a dried citrus fruit resembling a large, black, hollow hazelnut. It is especially prevalent in Southern Iraq, where it is used to make the tea enjoyed often in the southern city of Basra. In order to prepare the spice for use in the recipes below, place several whole Numi Basra in a spice grinder and grind very coarsely, so that the ground spice has a definite texture. Place in an airtight container and store in a freezer to preserve its potency.

3. Iraqi Curry Powder

Curry is of course an Indian dish, but Iraqis borrowed a version that became popular in Iraq, even if it differs slightly from the typical Indian curries. Bombay and Calcutta both had sizable Iraqi Jewish populations, which arose out of the prominence of Iraqi Jews in international trade, for example, of teas and spices. It is likely that the Iraqi Jews of India brought a taste for curry back to Baghdad.

Here too, it is best to buy the spices whole and grind them yourself. (The recipe for Iraqi curry is in the “Borrowed Classics” section.)

4 tablespoons coriander
2 tablespoons cumin
2 tablespoons turmeric
2 tablespoons cayenne (3 if desired hotter)
1 teaspoon paprika (optional)

4. Turshi Spice Mixture

[COMING SOON]

5. ‘Amba Spice Mixture

[COMING SOON]

6. Turshi

[COMING SOON]

7. **'Amba**

[COMING SOON]

8. **Pickled Lemons**

2 large lemons
¼ cup lemon juice
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon cayenne
1 teaspoon paprika

Peel lemons with a vegetable peeler to remove only a thin outer layer. Slice lemons into rounds and remove pits. Sprinkle with salt, cayenne, and paprika. Place in a dish and pour lemon juice over the sliced lemons. Mix well, cover, and refrigerate. Mix daily, and add spices to taste.

9. **“Salim’s Sauce”**

A condiment known only to Rachel’s family is “Salim’s Sauce”, an invention of Rachel’s husband, Salim Somekh. It is a nice condiment that goes especially well with some of the fried appetizers listed below.

2 tablespoons tomato paste
¼ cup cider or white vinegar
1 clove garlic, pressed into smooth paste
¼ - 1/3 teaspoon ground cloves
¼ teaspoon cayenne

Mix all ingredients together. Consistency should be slightly looser than ketchup. If too thick add more vinegar; if too thin add more tomato paste. Another option with regard to the garlic is to soak several cloves of garlic in a bottle of vinegar. Salim would do this, and use the garlic infused vinegar for the sauce.