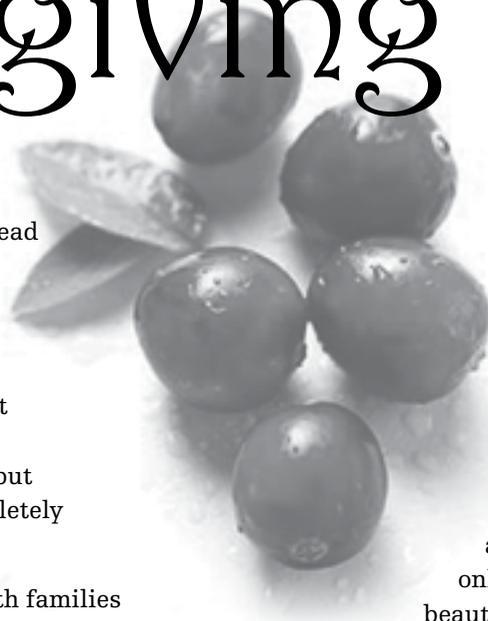


# Thanksgiving Masala



*Thanksgiving is my favourite holiday. It's a time to celebrate family and food.*

And honouring those two things is how I try to live my life. Food is larger than life in my family. I could probably create a fairly accurate timeline of my childhood by using memories of my mother and father's meals as guideposts.

My first Thanksgivings were in the U.S., my original home. We'd have an elaborate meal following intensive days of planning and preparation, all directed by Mom. My brother and I helped as we got older, making it a group event. He had a thing for making pumpkin pie; I floated around to whatever looked interesting.

My mom kept to tradition with turkey (or "Mr. Tom" Turkey, as my mom still calls it), which perennially took center stage, but held its place next to hearty platters of potatoes, both sweet and white, other vegetables and stuffing. Mom spent time making her cranberry sauce with whole berries and orange juice, but to her dismay, my brother and I turned up our noses at it. We preferred the gelatinous blob that best describes the canned jellied variety. And so both types were always on the table. (Here's a little dirty secret: I still prefer the blobby variety.)

And that was Turkey Day, year after year. At least until I married my husband, moved to Canada, and started celebrating the holiday here. Other than it being a month earlier, the premise was the same: spend time together as a family and eat. But the meal was different. Cranberry sauce and sweet potatoes made their appearances, but weren't guaranteed. In came corn and peas, my mother-in-law's scrumptious

homemade bread (if we were really lucky), and eating everything in a bowl. At first it was a little disorienting, but now it's completely natural.

Given that both families immigrated to North America from India, I wondered: how did Thanksgiving become a part of their food cultural landscapes? And how did my two families come to approach the holiday so differently?

In search of answers, I asked my mother to travel back in time to 1974, not long after she arrived in America as a new bride. My father had already been in the U.S. for some time, so by November he had told her about it as something "Americans did." Mom also read about it in newspapers and magazines; holiday recipes were featured on many covers and she was intrigued. Celebrating it seemed like a natural thing to do. Everyone else would be, so why not?

Thanksgiving 1974 was spent as guests of Dad's work colleague. The next year, my parents would host their very first Thanksgiving for family and close friends. A safe audience, just in case Mr. Tom didn't cooperate.

I was an infant for that first Thanksgiving dinner. Given what I now know about being a parent during the first few months of your child's life, I am astounded that mine even attempted to host a fancy dinner. I considered myself lucky if I brushed my teeth every day when my kids were this young!

Leading up to dinner was plenty of recipe research and analysis, something that still remains my mother's M.O. Mom's signature dish was a molded Jell-O salad in a loaf pan. It had flowers made

of carrots attached to "stems" made of green onions. It was the talk of the table and helped to make dinner a success. I can only imagine how beautiful it was, and how proud she must have been to bring it to her guests. She still uses that loaf pan today, only now it's used to bake banana bread. In fact, I never knew Mom made Jell-O until she told me this story; she certainly didn't grow up with the stuff, which makes it even more impressive that she attempted her molded salad for this special meal.

We were stationed in Germany for my junior high years. Military families tend to stick together while stationed overseas, forming a surrogate family. This became especially obvious at Thanksgiving. Food-wise, many holiday mainstays such as frozen turkeys, cranberry sauce and canned pumpkin were found at the military commissary where we shopped. Having a traditional Thanksgiving meal made us feel like we were home, even if just for one evening.

The menus weren't the same every year, but Mom is quick to point out that roasting a turkey is still her gold standard. She roasted a pheasant once, but it was disappointingly dry. I remember trying a deep fried turkey in New Orleans, and it was juicy and tasty. Sometimes the turkey is stuffed, and sometimes it's not. And pumpkin pie used to fly solo for dessert, but now it's accompanied by pecan pie. I guess that's the influence of Dad's sweet tooth.

So how did each side of my family arrive at their current Thanksgivings? Mom's approach

over the years seems like a culinary challenge, I think, rather than something driven by a need to acculturate. She certainly has similar approaches to other holidays and cuisines, which speaks to how continually fascinated with food — for food's sake alone — she has remained.

My husband's side also treasures sharing meals, but are less fixated on the food itself. Thanksgiving represents family time, and the meal is the means to facilitate that.

Regardless, Thanksgiving remains a highlight for me every fall. My move to Canada means that I get to celebrate my favorite holiday twice. We've hosted the dinner for my family here, and the menu is a hybrid of my past and present. My husband's side of the family is a little less obsessed about what's on the menu. Last year, we went rogue and made roast beef instead of turkey (sorry, Mom), which went over well. And if turkey can be dethroned, who knows what will be next?

That it can be turned on its head and still be enjoyable is what I love about Thanksgiving. As my life has taken its own natural twists and turns, different culinary influences have marinated and infused into my consciousness. This becomes apparent at holidays like Thanksgiving, which is different than it used to be, but no less delightful. To me, it is a delicious masala that represents my family, something that is always dynamic and evolving.

For now, anyway, Thanksgiving isn't right until I'm eating turkey, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, corn and peas... and my husband and his sister are beside me, eating theirs in bowls. 🍎

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*Deepti Babu is a genetic counsellor who hopes to find the gene for gastronomic passion one day. Her family is living proof that it exists.*



## MOM'S CRANBERRY ORANGE SAUCE

- 1¼ c sugar
- ½ c freshly squeezed orange juice
- ½ c water
- 2 c fresh cranberries, rinsed
- 2 T cognac/Grand Marnier
- 2 T orange zest

Combine sugar, orange juice and water in a saucepan. Heat on low until the sugar has dissolved. Add cranberries and cook for 15-19 minutes until they are cooked through.

Roughly mash berries with the back of a wooden spoon. Cool 5 minutes and add remaining ingredients, mixing well. Cool completely and refrigerate until ready to serve.

## GOLDEN GLOW SALAD

*Adapted from Helena Gavin, pg 184, 1979 edition  
Pamper your Palate, Zonta Club of Edmonton*

- 1 pkg lemon jello
- 1 c hot water
- 1 c pineapple juice
- ½ t salt
- 1 c diced pineapple
- 1 c grated raw carrot
- 1/3 c chopped nuts

Dissolve jello in hot water. Stir well. Add pineapple juice and salt. Stir. Chill until slightly thickened, then fold in pineapple and carrot. Pour into mold, chill until firm. Unmold on lettuce, garnish with ripe olives and mayonnaise. Serves 8-10.

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