

My Chai Formula

Adapted from *Bon Appetit*

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Chai means a lot of things to a lot of people. In Ethiopia, it's a milk-less spice infused tea; in Kashmir, it's salty and steeped in a samovar; in Starbucks, it's a syrupy, sugary, pre-mixed blend! But in my family's house, chai is typically a milky, English breakfast tea made earthy and aromatic with any combination of fresh ginger, cardamom pods, peppercorns, and cinnamon sticks.

For my mom, a pro-level, self-taught home cook, the significance of chai is not about an exact recipe, but the function it serves in her life. Her basic recipe comes from how her family drank chai when she was growing up in northern India, but she's been making it since she immigrated to America in 1980. Chai has always been my mom's moment to breathe—when she returns from her walk, when we've just done a big shopping trip, when she gets back from a vacation, and lately, when she's helping her daughter (me) test recipes for a cookbook.

"I'll help, but first..." she always tells my impatient self, her voice perfectly calm, "I've got to have my chai."

On most days, her chai routine is the same—an every day method that doesn't require any saucepans or fancy strainers. She boils water, and adds it to a flowery porcelain mug (the only one she'll use for chai, as it's exactly the right serving size) containing a bag of Tetley, a British brand of black tea with a huge following in India—my mom likes its extra strong flavor. Then she crushes a few whole

cardamom pods in a mortar and pestle, and throws them into the tea, along with a spoonful of sugar and a few splashes of milk.

The exceptions to her usual chai habits are on exceptionally cold or sick days, when she makes her extra-spiced chai. For this version, she crushes fresh ginger and some black peppercorns, maybe throwing in some cinnamon sticks for good measure; then she strains out the spices, and adds her usual milk and sugar. Each version she makes differs based on what's in the house. This is the chai you make when your throat needs some extra TLC, or when you need something to make your whole body feel cozy.

Yet another variation involves adding a few squirts of honey and two to three thin slices of lime into black tea as it steeps—the tea is served hot, but has slightly more refreshing notes, making it a pleasant summer drink. Maybe some people don't count that under their definition of chai; but chai, in Hindi, just translates to “tea.” It doesn't necessitate any specific combination of ingredients. For my mom, if it's warm and it soothes your soul, that's chai.

The Chai Formula

YOU START WITH ...



Black Tea

Strong!
Like really
strong



Seriously,
try it!



NEXT, CHOOSE A SWEETENER



Honey



White Sugar



Maple Syrup

THEN ADD MILK, IF YOU WANT



Milk



No Milk



Lime

Great with
honey



SPICE IT UP!



Ginger



Black Pepper

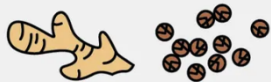


Cardamom



Cinnamon

(TRY THESE COMBOS)



For sick days!

