

Zing Factor To Any Meal

Heard this adage, give a lime and get a pickle? Well, not just lime, anything including a lemon, raw mango, green chillies or even carrots can be pickled. Any fruit or vegetable preserved in salt, oil, or brine and lot of spices (specially if it is Indian) is pickle. An interesting addition to this is, seafood and meat pickle too.

Imagine shapely baby cucumbers in vinegar. Ditto, imagine baby, tender mangoes in salt brine. Indian homes or most south Indian homes make tender (whole) mango pickle called vadu manga. A relish enjoyed with a big helping of curd rice.

It is the combination of aromatic cold butter milk mixed with rice and whole tender mangoes pickled in red chilly paste, oil and salt makes thair saadam (curd rice) special and a memorable meal. Not just thair saadam, dal chawal (lentils and steamed rice) and lemon pickle or mung khichadi and green chillie pickle or another interesting combination would be bhakri and loncha. (Bhakri is your good old flat bread in Gujrati and Marathi and loncha is pickle in Marathi). Murrabba or sweet pickle is another hot favorite with Indians. Gujrat and western Maharashtra including Konkan and some Indian states are known for adding sugar or jaggery to most of their dishes. Murabba is relished with great gusto in these parts. A hot and sweet mango murabba spread on chapatti tastes just great either as a complete meal or as a snack.

Summer is the preferred season when people set out to make pickles and other savories. Clay jars are preferred and sunlight is one essential ingredient besides a whole lot of spices etc. Raw green mangoes and lemon are the favored fruits followed by long green chillies, gooseberry, ginger root, carrots, shallots, garlic and carrot. It is not always raw fruits and vegetables that is used in making pickle, people from coastal and other areas including Goa, Kerala, Karanataka and Andhra Pradesh are known for making tasty prawn pickles. Chicken, meat pickles are popular too with meat lovers. Another important feature is pickles in India have distinct and varied tastes depending on which part of India it is coming from. South Indians prefer sesame oil, while North Indians prefer mustard oil, groundnut oil is preferred by Gujratis and some other Western Indian states for making and preserving pickle. Oil bearing a strong aroma is preferred, therefore sesame, mustard is in demand when one plans to make pickle. Mustard either powdered or seeds, whole fennel and fenugreek, turmeric powder, asafetida, red chilly powder, some sugar and salt are must have condiments for any pickle. Once you decide on what oil and spices you are planning to mix with either mango, lemon or green chilly or even prawn, you are set to travel the pickle route.

It is not about what goes into making a pickle. It is about the relish itself and fact of the matter being either you are a pickle lover or you are not. For some it is the most exciting item in a meal. Here is the interesting thing, though a fascinating item in a meal, it is always a non-entity till one day... that day is when you are attracted to try this little side, looking all decked up in its finery of oil and special spices. You are tempted to try it, just a small bite at first. Because it has been beckoning you for a while. Every time you missed this oh-so-ordinary yet interesting little item, wondering, what if it is too salty, too briny, or too hot and spicy? But today you just took a chance and tried it. Ah, you liked the lingering taste and the magic it created on your taste buds. You want to try some more. And then you start loving it and the next thing is, you cannot have a meal without this little sidey! Did somebody say 'pickle eating is an acquired taste?' It seems so.

From briny to oily to spicy and sweet, to bitter, pickle wears different tastes easily.