

Mumbai TimeOut Review 3/28/2011
Chettinad Kitchen Cookbook by Alamelu Vairavan



Cookbooks may be the only exception to the rule: Don't judge a book by its cover. That's certainly the case with *Chettinad Kitchen*, where what you see on the cover is really what you get. The cover features half a coconut, a little mound of rice, a piece of ginger, some curry leaves placed on a grinding stone and a gold, peacock-embroidered border of a silk sari, the kind donned by most married South Indian women on special occasions. It's the culinary secrets of the Kancheevaram-wearing, super-efficient cooks from Tamil Nadu that Alamelu Vairavan shares in her third book.

The author lives in Wisconsin but don't let that fool you into thinking her recipes are sanitized to suit the western palate.

Vairavan, who also co-authored the *Art of South Indian Cooking* and *Healthy South Indian Cooking*, focuses here on the Chettinadu region where she grew up. The region is known for its fiery, sinus-clearing dishes that make generous use of pepper and red chillies, and the recipes for these dominate the non-vegetarian offerings in the book.

Chettinad Kitchen is an old-school cookbook which means there aren't any air-brushed pictures or entire pages dedicated to artfully-ripped herbs or witty little notes before each dish. What it does have is a long list of recipes for breakfast items, chutneys, lentil-based curries, vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes and rice. In addition to the usual suspects like sambar, rasam, tamarind rice, there are also more unusual recipes like the pineapple rasam and kavararisi – a breakfast sweet dish made from black rice, sugar, cardamom and fresh coconut.

We tried out the recipe for Chettinad chicken masala, a tangy and fire power-filled dish of chicken cooked in lots of ginger garlic paste, tomatoes and onions with roast cumin and pepper, and found Vairavan's no-nonsense descriptions a welcome change from the flowery language so many cookbooks seem to use nowadays. It's a keeper for those looking for basic South Indian recipes as well as the slightly more complex and time-consuming – but totally worth it – concoctions like the meen kulambu fish, a tangy, tart fish curry made with tamarind paste. Our copy already boasts a tiny splatter of oil stains. *Neha Sumitran*

Source : *Time Out Mumbai* VOL. 7 ISSUE 13, February 18 - March 3 2011.

[Post Your Comments](#)

Latest user reviews