

Trinidad Roti

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Background: Trinidad roti consists of a spicy dhal puri bread in which you put a relatively dry curry and fold it closed to eat like a rectangular burrito. The multiple layers of dhal puri and curry make for a delicious combination. I have tried other dhal puri recipes but this is clearly the best tasting and is very tender, even after freezing and reheating. Any kind of curry can be used: chicken, beef, goat (or lamb), shrimp, and vegetarian are the most popular. I provide several curry recipes I have picked up during my travels or which have been shared with me by friends.

Dhal Puri Filling: (Do first and save in a container in refrigerator until needed):

1. **Ingredients:** More than necessary for 20 roti):
 - 2 cups dried split yellow peas (dhal)
 - 1 tsp curry powder
 - 1 peeled smashed garlic clove
 - ½ tsp turmeric
 - 2 or more heaping tsp ground cumin
 - ¼ tsp ground thyme
 - 2 scallions chopped fine
 - 1-2 sprigs cilantro chopped fine
 - ½ small hot pepper seeded and chopped fine
 - ½ tsp salt
 - Celery salt, black pepper, garlic powder, and onion powder to taste
2. Rinse peas several times in fresh water, remove broken or discolored ones.
3. Put peas in pan at least twice current volume of peas and cover with fresh water and heat
4. Once simmering, add crushed garlic, curry powder, and turmeric and mix well.
5. Cover and cook 20-25 minutes, keeping peas covered with water as they expand.
6. Peas are done when they just crush into small granules when squeezed between thumb and forefinger but are not mushy. Drain peas in a colander and let cool.
7. Combine chopped scallions, cilantro, and hot pepper in a bowl, sprinkle with salt, cumin, and thyme and mix well.
8. Set up old style metal meat grinder with fine grinding wheel and provide a container to collect the grindings. Add drained and cooled peas a few tablespoons at a time to grinder, add a dollop of the vegetable herb mixture, and grind into receptacle. Continue until all peas are ground, carefully spacing veggie mix addition so there is some for each batch of peas. When done, do NOT add remaining contents inside grinder to ground peas as this will contain unground peas that can puncture bread later.
9. Put ground pea mixture in bowl and gradually add celery salt, black ground pepper, garlic powder, and onion powder to taste. Mixture should be fairly strong, as it will have to compete with bread in final product.
10. When well mixed, put pea mixture in food processor and grind it even finer. Do this in batches and then combine the batches. The final product should be very fine and almost grainy (like a fine sand). Put in the refrigerator for now. (Excess can be frozen and used for later dhal puri preparation without having to do all this work!) Note: if done carefully

to avoid no intact peas remaining, could do all grinding in food processor. I have not tried it.)

Dhal Puri Breads: One secret of this dhal puri is the addition of fat to the flour before mixing. This is done in the same manner as making pie crust dough. This plus the gluten worked up during kneading produce a bread that is strong enough to hold shape but is also soft and flakey when eaten. Adding fat and doing it this way is critical to the final product!

1. Ingredients (For 16-25 roti depending on desired size):
 - 8 cups all-purpose white flour (note: 4 cups flour = 1 lb)
 - 2 tsp baking powder
 - ½ tsp salt
 - 5 tbsp shortening (cool in freezer first)
 - 2 tbsp butter (cool in freezer first)
 - ½ cup milk diluted with water to make 2 ½ cups
2. Mix dry ingredients and sift into a large bowl
3. Cut the shortening into fingernail sized pieces and toss into flour, stirring gently to distribute them evenly. Then do same with butter. Do this quickly so neither gets very soft. Then work the fat and flour between the thumbs and fingers of your hands to create floury flakes (like oatmeal). If you have made pie crust, this is the same technique. When all the fat is flaked and floured, slowly add the liquid, using closed fingers on one hand to draw it all into a single central sticky mass. Place the mass on a non-stick surface and use the heel of one hand to smear the mass away from the center in 4 directions (fraissage). No need to mix further.
4. Use a pastry knife to scrape the dough into one mass again, put it in a plastic bag, and let it rest in the refrigerator for 15-20 minutes. This evens out moisture.
5. Remove the dough from the bag and knead it on a floured surface for 4-5 minutes until a poked hole largely closes itself.
6. Let it rest again in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.
7. Divide the dough into balls that will become the individual dhal puris. The number of balls determines how large the final roti bread will be. Dividing 8 cups of flour into 25 balls (about 65 g each after adding liquid) will produce 8-9-inch diameter breads; dividing it into 20 balls (85 g each) will produce 9-10-inch breads, and dividing it into 16 balls (100 g each) will produce 10-11-inch rotis. We find that 20 balls/8 cups of flour produce a size just right for a meal.
8. To insert filling in balls:
 - Set the balls in a row. Take each ball in one hand, shape it into a deep cup with uniform wall thickness using your free hand. You can also do this by setting the ball on a non-sticking surface, then push down in the middle with both thumbs and pinch up the sides between thumbs and fingers all around to make the cup. Having some flour on the fingers helps.
 - Pack filling into the well of the cup shape. Use 2 heaping tablespoons of filling if doing 20-25 balls, a bit more if doing only 16.
 - With spread fingers on free hand, work edges of cup closed and pinch to seal well. Be sure there are no cracks or holes visible.
 - Gently flatten filled ball into thick patty a few inches in diameter and set aside.

9. When all balls are filled, start with first filled patty and using a floured surface and floured rolling pin, begin flattening. Keep rotating and turning bread over to ensure uniform thickness and take your time to get it to final size. No holes should be present in either surface. When bread is at final size (9-10" for 20 ball recipe), move flattened bread to holding site, retaining order of creation in lineup. Note: if your filling pokes through the pastry when rolling, you did not grind the filling fine enough. Stop now and grind it finer in a food processor. There should be NO large particles.
10. To bake the dhal puri breads:
 - Prepare a mixture of vegetable oil and melted butter (1:1) in a wide bowl and set near stove. Have a flat-bottomed glass or cup handy.
 - Heat a flat griddle at least a few inches greater in diameter than the roti breads. Use medium heat to start and adjust as necessary.
 - When griddle is hot enough to sizzle a water drop, dip cup in oil mixture and slide over griddle surface. You only need to do this before first bread is baked.
 - Plop first flattened bread disk on griddle and immediately use bottom of cup to smear a light layer of oil on top of bread surface.
 - Wait about 10 seconds and use a spatula to turn the bread over. Again, dip the cup in the oil mixture and use the cup bottom to smear a light layer of oil on the top surface of the bread.
 - Turn bread over once more, and again oil its surface but then push down gently on center of bread (or any place you see a bubble forming). The bread should begin to puff and inflate, the two surfaces of the bread trapping the steam. If it does not puff, you may need more heat. If either surface is very brown, instead of a few brown spots, or it looks too cooked to puff, the heat is too high. Adjust as necessary. At the right heat, most breads will puff at least some.
 - Once puffing or 10 sec cooking on that final side have passed, remove the cooked roti bread to one side of a kitchen towel and fold the other half of the towel over it.
 - As each bread comes off the griddle, just stack it on top of the prior ones and cover with the towel. This communal steaming helps leave them soft and pliant.
11. If planning to use breads soon, just leave wrapped in towel. If you want to freeze them for future use, let them cool and then put a sheet of wax paper between each pair of breads before sealing in a double plastic bag and freezing. This keeps breads from sticking to each other during later defrosting.

To serve Roti:

1. Heat up curry (or curries; see recipes next pages) to be used in rotis. Have ready on stove.
2. Heat up griddle used to bake dhal puri to medium heat.
3. Place a dhal puri bread on the hot griddle for 5-10 seconds, flip over and heat other side, and repeat at least once more until bread is heated through and very pliable but not cooked any further.
4. Put bread on a plate and add curry to center (about ½-¾ cup of curry for 10-inch bread)
5. If hot sauce is desired (e.g. Matouk's from Trinidad), now is the time to sprinkle it on the curry.
6. Fold the left and right edges of the bread over the curry. Then fold the top and bottom edges over the prior folds to create a rectangular bundle.
7. Wrap in flexible delicatesen paper open at one end and serve.

Curry Recipes

Indian Chicken curry: We found this to be an excellent option for roti. Indians do not use commercial “curry” but use their own mix of spices. Boneless thighs can be used if you want to skip the boning step.

1. Ingredients:

- 8 thighs, bone-in, remove skin (or boneless skinless thighs)
 - 1 can garbanzo beans (chickpeas)
 - 2-3 tbsp oil
 - 3 whole cloves or ground equivalent
 - Seeds from 3 cardamom pods (about 20)
 - 1 inch cinnamon stick, in pieces
 - ½ tsp cumin seeds
 - 1 large onion, chopped
 - 1 tsp fresh ginger, finely chopped
 - 1 tsp garlic, finely chopped
 - ½ tsp or more turmeric
 - ½ tsp or more chili powder (add a little cayenne pepper if desired)
 - ¼ cup cilantro, chopped
 - 1 can coconut milk (use amount as needed)
2. In a large skillet with high sides and a lid, heat the oil and add cloves, cardamom, cinnamon, and cumin seeds, cook lightly.
 3. Add the chopped onions, brown lightly.
 4. Add turmeric and chili powder, mix well, and when blended and oil coming out of spices add and toss the chicken to cover with mix and cover the pan.
 5. Cook covered at medium for about 10 min, turn pieces over, cook about 5 more min.
 6. Add garbanzo beans, cover and cook 5 more min.
 7. Add coconut milk carefully, somewhere between half to a whole can is about right. You want the final curry to be cohesive and non-runny but still moist.
 8. Mix everything well, cover and cook 10 more min, stirring occasionally.
 9. Pull meat off the bone and shred (or cut into bite sized pieces if using boneless chicken).
 10. Remove cinnamon sticks and any whole spice seeds you see. Return shredded chicken to the mix, add cilantro, test for salt
 11. Add lemon or lime juice if needed. If too runny, add cornstarch mixed with liquid.
 12. Can be refrigerated and is even better if it has sat in refrigerator a while.

Variations on above theme:

- Can do above recipe with beef, goat, lamb, or vegetables, adjusting time as appropriate. Can also do shrimp adding a bit of ketchup to taste.
- Slightly fancier version uses above spices but adds: 2 tsp ground coriander, 1 tsp ground cumin, 2 tsp chili powder, and ½ cup water
- Do rest of first recipe but adjust coconut milk amount to wetness desired.

Traditional Trinidad Beef, Chicken, goat, or Shrimp Curry:

1. Ingredients:
 - 1.5 lb meat
 - 2 large onions chopped finely
 - 1" piece of fresh ginger chopped finely
 - 3 peeled garlic cloves chopped finely
 - 2 seeded green chili peppers chopped finely
 - 3 tbsp cooking oil
 - 4 tbsp curry
 - 1 15-oz can of garbanzos drained
 - 1-2 cups coconut milk
2. Cut beef, goat, or chicken into small cubes; cut shelled shrimp in half crosswise.
3. Fry chopped veggies in oil until lightly browned.
4. Add curry and continue cooking to mix oil and spices. Add a bit of water if too dry.
5. Add garbanzos and then meat and stir to mix well. Add salt and pepper to taste.
6. Add coconut milk being careful not to add too much liquid.
7. Cook 75 minutes for beef or goat, 29 min for chicken, a few minutes for shrimp.

Veggie Curry:

1. Ingredients:
 - 2 lb (2 cups) potatoes, peeled and diced
 - 2 cups cauliflower florets
 - 1 cup green beans, chopped
 - 1 cup carrots, chopped
 - 2/3 cup green peas, fresh or frozen
 - 2 medium onions, chopped
 - 2 medium tomatoes chopped
 - 5 cloves garlic, minced
 - 1 tbsp ginger, minced
 - 3 tbsp curry powder
 - ¼ tsp cumin
 - ½ cup coconut milk
 - ½ cup cilantro leaves, chopped
 - vegetable stock as needed
 - Optional: 8 curry leaves (available in some Asian markets), ¼ tsp allspice, 1-2 tbsp desiccated coconut, 2 green chilies chopped, canned garbanzo beans
2. In large container, cook onion, garlic and ginger in oil until soft but not brown.
3. Add curry powder and cumin, and allspice, curry leaves and other optional ingredients, and fry for 1 min.
4. Add ½ cup coconut milk and cook until mixture thickens
5. Add potatoes, carrots, green beans, cauliflower and peas, stir and saute for 1-2 min.
6. Add tomatoes and cook several minutes.
7. Add enough liquid (vegetable stock) to cover the veggies, lower heat, and cook until potatoes and veggies are soft but not mushy, 15-20 min.
8. Season with salt and pepper, add cilantro. Thicken if necessary.