CHAI

For people in India and much of the rest of the world, chai is tea. The most common method of brewing Indian chai involves tossing tea leaves into a kettle of boiling water, simmering for a few minutes, adding milk and sugar, and, once the milk boils, removing from the stove and straining into a pre-warmed teapot or mug. What most Americans call chai should actually be called “masala chai,” or “spiced tea.” This is prepared the same way as Indian chai, but with spices such as cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, and black pepper added. Supermarkets in this country now sell pre-mixed concentrates of masala chai that need only to be heated in a kettle or microwave and have milk added as needed. Chai is also very popular in American coffeehouses, although usually a much sweeter version.

Many families in India have their own chai recipes and grind fresh spices at home. Try the following recipe for yourself, then sit back and relax with a hot, delicious cup of chai.

MOCHA CHAI MASALA

2 quarts water
2 teaspoons allspice berries, lightly crushed
5 black peppercorns, lightly crushed
8 green cardamom pods, lightly crushed
2 tablespoons fennel seeds
12 cloves
4 tablespoons tea (jasmine, green, Darjeeling, etc.)
¼-inch ginger, thinly sliced
3 bay leaves
3 star anise
1 vanilla bean, split
4 tablespoons honey or jaggery to taste
2 cups milk (soy, almond, rice, or dairy)
½ cup white chocolate, chopped

1. Place water in covered stockpot and set stove to high heat.
2. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer.
3. Measure allspice, peppercorns, cardamom, fennel, cloves, and tea into a large tea bag or sachet.
4. Add to simmering water.
5. Add ginger, bay leaves, star anise, and vanilla to simmering mixture; allow to steep, uncovered, for 5 minutes or until flavors are released into water (tasting is key).
6. Add honey, milk, and white chocolate, stirring to incorporate/melt.
7. Remove pot from heat; strain mixture if desired.
8. Serve immediately.

Yield: 2¼ quarts (10 cups)
Portion size: 1 cup (8 ounces)
Portions per batch: 10

Over for descriptions of the spices used in this recipe
SPICES FOR CHAI

The following is just a sampling of the many ingredients you can use to spice up your next cup of chai.

ALLSPICE
Dried, unripened, pea-sized berry that comes from the small evergreen pimento tree. It’s dark reddish-brown; tastes like cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves; and is available whole or ground.

ANISE
Dried ripe fruit of the herb Pimpinella anisum that has a flavor similar to fennel seeds. It’s light brown, and has a sweet, spicy, licorice taste and aroma.

BAY LEAF
Smooth, oval leaf that’s green, aromatic, and most commonly available dried.

BLACK PEPPERCORNS
Dried, dark, shriveled berry that is picked unripe and allowed to dry. It has a strong, peppery flavor; is the most common of all peppers; and is available as whole berries, cracked, or ground.

CARDAMOM
Dried, unripened fruit that’s a member of the ginger family. These small seeds have a strong aroma, a sweet, spicy flavor, and are available as whole pods (green, black, or bleached white cranberry), seeds, or ground.

CINNAMON
Dried inner bark of a tropical tree. It’s reddish-brown and available in sticks or ground.

CLOVES
Dried, unopened flower of the tropical evergreen clove tree. They’re reddish-brown and spike-shaped with a sweet and pungent flavor, and are available whole or ground.

STAR ANISE
Dried, eight- to 12-pointed pod from a Chinese evergreen. This member of the magnolia family is star-shaped and dark brown with an intense licorice flavor and aroma, should be used sparingly, and is available whole or ground.

VANILLA BEANS
Pod of a delicate orchid flower. Vanilla has a distinct aromatic flavor, and is available as whole beans or as an extract.