



Bunny chow

Many legendary dishes worldwide have their roots in eras of need or repression, and the iconic bunny chow is no different. In the 1940s, serving a saucy curry in a hollowed-out half-loaf was an inventive way for Durban café owners to sidestep segregationist laws and serve food to black patrons (who weren't allowed to sit down and eat in many establishments) without the need for plates or cutlery. Today, Durban and the greater KwaZulu-Natal area is probably more famous for its bunny chows than its beaches, and the locals support their most-loved bunny 'dens' fanatically. You'll find many versions of the bunny chow: chicken, lamb or mutton, vegetarian or bean, spicy or mild, half-loaf, quarter-loaf or mini. This recipe is for a classic half-loaf bunny chow, filled with Durban bean curry (ordered as a 'half beans'). It is most definitely eaten by hand and considered by many Durbanites to be the best takeaway in the world — simple, flavourful, messy and interactive.

Notes

1. You won't find a bunny chow in India: it is a quintessential South African dish.
2. No, it is not made with rabbit meat.
3. The word 'bunny' is believed to be derived from the Indian word 'bania', referring to the Hindu mercantile caste who ran popular vegetarian eateries in Durban's CBD during the time that the bunny chow was born. Many say that the first bunny chows were vegetarian.
4. A bunny chow must be served with the crust of the bread intact at the bottom (the end of the loaf). When the middle of the bread is used without the crust, some call it a 'funny bunny'.

MAKES 2 LARGE HALF-LOAF BUNNIES (OR 4 MEDIUM QUARTER-LOAF BUNNIES)

1 batch Durban bean curry (see page 121)

1 soft white bread loaf

a small handful fresh dhania (coriander leaves), roughly chopped

1 medium carrot, peeled and roughly grated (optional)

¼ cucumber, finely sliced (optional)

Prepare the bean curry in advance and set aside (even a day ahead, to be reheated before serving). Slice the loaf in half in the width and use your hand to hollow out the centres, leaving the crusts intact. Scoop the warm curry into the hollow of each bread 'cup', making sure to fill it generously with some of the sauce spilling over the sides. Serve scattered with dhania, with the hollowed-out chunk of bread for dunking, optionally with a simple side of grated carrot and cucumber.



Durban bean curry

To many Durbanites, a vegetarian bean curry is the ultimate filling for the iconic bunny chow (read more about its history on page 109). There are many curry eateries in Durban that specialise in vegetarian curries, with some longstanding vegetarian bunny houses serving up to 500 bunnies a day. When in season, fresh broad beans (and many other types of beans) are readily available at many fresh-produce markets in Durban, yet most broad-bean curries are cooked from dried beans (dried broad beans are called fava beans). A great bean curry is considerably more economical to make than a meat curry, but it will never take a backseat to its meaty counterparts. A staple and true icon in its own right.

Note

To save time, canned beans can also be used. Substitute 2 cans of drained canned beans for the uncooked beans listed below.

SERVES 4

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| 500 g dried beans (butter beans / broad beans / sugar beans) | 1–2 green chillies, chopped (optional) |
| 2 litres (8 cups) water | 4 Tbsp (¼ cup) mixed masala (or all-purpose masala) |
| 125 ml (½ cup) vegetable oil | 5 ml (1 tsp) ground turmeric |
| 1 large onion, finely chopped | 3 large ripe tomatoes, halved and grated from the inside (skins discarded) |
| 2 sticks cinnamon | about 20 curry leaves |
| 15 ml (1 Tbsp) yellow or black mustard seeds | salt, to taste |
| 3 cloves garlic, crushed or grated | fresh dhanīa (coriander leaves), to serve |
| 30 ml (2 Tbsp) ginger, crushed or grated | |

To a large pot, add the beans and cover with the water. Bring to a simmer, then cook for 1 hour. Remove the pot from the heat and leave to stand for 30 minutes, then return to the heat and simmer until tender (about another hour). Drain and set aside. In a large pot, heat the oil over medium heat and fry the onion until it starts to soften. Add the cinnamon and mustard seeds and continue to fry until the onion starts to turn golden. Add the garlic, ginger, chillies, masala and turmeric and stir for a minute. Add the tomatoes and curry leaves, stir well, and bring to a simmer. Season with salt to taste. Add the cubed potatoes and water, stirring, then bring to a slow simmer and cook for 20–30 minutes, partly covered with a lid until the potatoes are tender. Add the cooked beans, then bring to a slow simmer for another 10 minutes. Serve warm, scooped into a hollowed-out, white half or quarter loaf (see the recipe for bunny chow, page 109), or with cooked rice or Indian roti (see page 38) and sambals.