

# SUPPERS



# WITH SOUL

Intimate, exciting and underground – supper clubs dish up a different way of dining, bringing strangers together over a shared appetite for innovative food and a communal feel. A cross between a restaurant and a dinner party, these cosy pop-up experiences, often held in the familiarity of someone’s home, have been around for several years now, a reaction to the kind of eateries that charge £25-plus for a small plate. Today, the best are still those that offer a more personal touch, allowing people to gather in a friendly place to enjoy dishes cooked by chefs who have a genuine story to tell. We sit down with one supper club chef, Punam Vaja, who is sharing the Gujarati food she grew up with. She explains how a connection to each guest is formed when you get the chance to express how a recipe came about



**Did you always want to work with food, Punam (pictured, bottom right)?**  
I grew up in East London in a very tight-knit family with my parents, siblings and also my grandmother, who used to live with us too. My dad has four sisters and one brother and they’d often come by to visit my grandmother – their mum. As well as being popular in our family, she was well-known in the community, so people would just come around. Back then no one called ahead, you’d just try your luck and turn up. She was big on

hospitality and treated each guest with utmost care, making sure no one left without eating. I think this is where I picked up my tenacity for hosting and getting people together over food.

**What inspired you to start the Khao Supper Club?**  
I lived in Hackney for a while and used to rustle up Gujarati dishes all the time. One of my housemates ran bi-yearly supper clubs at E5 Bakehouse, where she’d raise money for local charities.

She saw I was pretty proficient in the kitchen and asked me to join as her sous chef. I did a few supper clubs with her, where we cooked up a storm for 50-plus guests. It was my first time witnessing this sort of gathering. I was used to being around large pots of food, because back in the 1990s, when we’d have a large family event or gathering, the food was prepared at home. I’m talking quantities of 100 to 200 on occasion! We still have some of those huge cooking pots at home. So I felt very much at home





preparing dinner for large supper clubs. It was from there that I held a small gathering of friends at home, where I recreated some traditional Gujarati dishes for friends – it was probably what you could call my very first supper club. I took their positive feedback and made the decision to go ahead and officially organise one. We moved some furniture around and fit 25 people in the front room. I can still remember the buzz. At one point, the music couldn't even be heard over the chitter chatter and laughter of the guests!



**Why do you think supper clubs are so good at bringing people together?**  
I strongly feel that unlike a restaurant, supper clubs have a way of stripping away the idea of being an 'individual'. You can come alone, but you won't be alone once you arrive! The togetherness of sitting for a shared meal, whether

it is formal or casual, becomes a group activity. You're served at the same time, addressed together, and usually if you're sat at a communal table, you're forced to socialise with others. This is the beauty of supper clubs that cannot be created in a restaurant setting. As social beings, I feel supper clubs work well in our favour

to bring us together without it feeling forced. It's just the way it is!  
**Where do you usually start when planning a menu?**  
The inspiration for my menu comes from home. Brought up in a traditional Gujarati family, I am aware there are so







*‘We’ve had so many friendships created from guests who have been seated together at a Khao Supper Club’*

many flavours and tastes that are unique to my home life. There are dishes that we make which are hardly heard of outside of a Gujarati household and I love the idea of being able to share them.

My menus are inspired by the stories of migration from my family too. Coming to the UK in the late 1970s, they were exposed to a whole new array of vegetables and fruits that were foreign, but by trial and error, they recreated traditional dishes along with new creations. I love the idea of looking in the fridge to see what there is and how I can adapt it to create a familiar taste. Similarly, when planning a menu for a supper club, I think of ingredients that

most people will know, and see how I can create a dish that compliments it using the unique cooking techniques and flavours from my Gujarati heritage.

**What do you enjoy most about hosting a supper club?**

I love being able to share the ideas behind a dish. There’s a certain connection to each guest that is formed when you get the chance to share how a dish came about or the story behind sharing it. Often times, these stories trigger a memory in a diner and they’ll share their own personal story of a reminiscent dish, and it’s so wholesome to hear these.

**Do people tend to turn up alone or book with friends?**

The great thing about a supper club is if you do come alone, it’s totally fine. Many people will book with partners, parents and friends, but if you are someone who loves to go to these sorts of experiences alone, they’re a great place to meet and make new friends and connections. We’ve had so many new friendships created from guests who have been seated together at a Khao Supper Club. I’m still waiting for my first couple to be formed... I’m sure it’ll happen one day!

*Price for a place, from £30-£50. [khaosuppers.com](http://khaosuppers.com); [@khao\\_suppers](https://www.instagram.com/khao_suppers)*



**PUNAM’S TIPS FOR HOSTING A GATHERING**

Every dish I share holds something personal to me, whether it’s a childhood connection or something that came about from an idea. Creating dishes with personality and meaning comes from understanding what it is that you want to make the diner feel. Sometimes, this is to simply to enjoy a dish, other times you want to take them on a taste explosion. Let the story you want to share come through the dish, from it’s ingredients and flavours to the presentation.



I take plating as a crucial part in conveying the story behind the dish, as we all eat with our eyes first. I love challenging myself to create a presentation that doesn’t seem overcomplicated, but at the same time portrays the dish in its best form. I also love setting up tables and adding personal touches to the tables from small favours to flowers. If I was to give any tips, I’d say keep it simple, but also make it personal. And if you’re having sharing plates... don’t over do it!

People always respond well when they can come into a space that sparks multiple senses – whether it’s smell, sight or sound. I think all of these are crucial in creating the right kind of ambience you want to portray. Whether it’s soft mood lighting for a chilled dinner or brighter lights for a more energetic evening, it’s great to think about how you want to set up the room, what sounds you’d like people to hear when they’re in the space. Incense is good for creating special scents, while the use of candles can double as lighting.





## SPINACH & CHICKPEA CHAAT

Mum was born in the bustling city of Mumbai, so anytime it comes to Bombay street food, her dishes are the best! This recipe takes the key elements of her chaat dish and reimagines it in a much more paired-down version, without altering the joys of a chaat. This is perfect for sharing.

### Serves 4

- One bag of spinach or loose spinach leaves
- 2 cups of boiled chickpeas
- Half an onion, diced
- One tomato, diced
- Tamarind & date chutney (see no 3)
- Green chutney (see no 4)
- Coriander, chopped

1. Set your oven to 200°C to preheat.

2. Wash and dry the spinach and cut off any long stems. Place each leaf flat on an oven tray and spray or brush a little oil over these. Once the oven is ready, bake the leaves for 5-6 minutes until crispy, checking they don't burn. They will crisp up pretty quickly.

3. The key flavours of a chaat come from the chutneys. You can buy the tamarind and date one in the shops, or if you have time, you can make your own.

### TAMARIND AND DATE CHUTNEY

- 900ml (4-6 cups) water
- Dry tamarind or you can buy a tamarind concentrate paste in most Asian supermarkets
- 155g (1 cup) jaggery sugar or a pack of dates
- ½ tsp salt (or to taste)
- ½ tsp cayenne pepper
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp ground ginger

- Heat 2-3 cups of water over a medium-high heat until just boiling. Add the tamarind concentrate and stir until completely incorporated. Turn off heat and let it cool.
- Heat the remaining 2-3 cups of water and bring to boiling, adding the dates if using those.
- Once these are boiled, separately sieve each one into a pan, separating any seeds, skin or bits, so you are left with a smooth puree.
- Once you have a pot each of the tamarind and dates, slowly add the tamarind into the date puree, one ladle at a time, tasting as you go to reach a flavour of sweet-savouriness that

you like. The tamarind is very sour, so be careful doing this bit! if you feel it's not sweet enough, you can add jaggery powder or brown sugar.

- Now add the ginger, cumin, cayenne and salt to the sauce, tasting and adjusting the quantities as you go. Store this in a clean glass jar and it should keep in your fridge for a few days, or freeze and use as you wish.

### 4. MAKE THE GREEN CHUTNEY

- 100g fresh coriander, washed with stems
- 3-4 green chillies (reduce for less spice)
- 1/2 green pepper
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 1 tsp brown sugar
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 120ml (1/2 cup) water

- Place all the ingredients in a food processor and grind until pureed and smooth.
- Adjust the flavours half way, adding more salt, sugar and lemon so they are balanced. If you have unripe mangos, they help to create a thicker sauce, so add a 1/4 mango.
- This will stay good for up to two weeks if kept in an airtight container and refrigerated.

5. Plating. In a large bowl, place some of the spinach on the bottom. Top this with the chickpeas, tomatoes, onions and then a few spoonfuls of the two chutneys. Remember, the green chutney adds the spice, so don't add a lot, you can always add more after tasting. Add a little more spinach on top and finish with chopped coriander. The chaat is best eaten as the spinach is still crunchy, so serve immediately. If you have crackers or tortilla chips, use these to scoop up the chaat and enjoy.







## GREEN MUNG

There was a time when this dish was made at home every Wednesday. Green mung is high in nutritious value, but is also a lentil that is connected closely to religious practices. Green is often considered an auspicious colour, and we believe this is why green mung is cooked on religious days and also used in its dry form during worship. We enjoy eating this dish for its earthy flavour, but also love that they are a symbol of auspiciousness! Best enjoyed with slightly sticky rice.

### Serves 4

- ½ cup green mung
- 2 tbsp oil (we use vegetable oil)
- ½ tsp mustard seeds
- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- ¼ tsp asafoetida
- 1 medium tomato, diced
- ½ tsp turmeric/hardar
- 3 cloves garlic, diced or crushed
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1½-inch piece ginger, crushed
- 1 tsp chillies, crushed or finely chopped
- Handful of curry leaves/limbdo
- Small handful of fresh coriander, chopped

**1.** If you have a pressure cooker, rinse the mung and cook in the pressure cooker with a little salt for 15-20 mins. Otherwise you will need to soak the mung beans in water overnight and then boil them well just before you want to make this. Make sure you wash them after soaking as the boiled water will also be added to the dish.

**2.** In a deep pan, add the oil and let it heat up. Add a few mustard seeds to check it is ready. If they start to sizzle, add the rest of the mustard seeds, and wait for them to start popping. This can get a bit violent, so keep the lid close by!

**3.** Now add the cumin seeds and asafoetida, and immediately add the limbdo and garlic. Grab a wooden spoon and give the garlic a good stir and then add the mung, with any water that you used to boil it in. Stir it well so the garlic is mixed in.

**4.** Add the tomatoes, all the spices, the ginger and garlic and let this cook with the lid on for 10 minutes. Now remove the lid and have a taste, adding salt and any other spices it may need more of. The main flavour is of the actual mung, so be sure not to over-spice. Let this cook for a further 10-15 minutes without the lid and then take off the heat and enjoy.

This can be enjoyed with rice or rotli (chapatis).



## TOMATO NU SHAAK

In Gujarati, a shaak is likened to a curry, but it can also be dry, without the sauce. I don't really know what else it would be called in English, so we stick to the Gujarati word, shaak. It's pronounced just like you'd say shark.

Tomatoes. They come in so many shapes and sizes. For this particular shaak, we have created it with a variety; regular red tomatoes, heritage tomatoes, small cherry tomatoes and even green tomatoes. Feel free to use up whatever you have at home. We usually grow our own tomatoes, and so love making these with the unripe green ones! It is really simple and pairs well with a wrap, rice or bread, and is especially ideal with wholewheat rotli or chapati.

### Serves 4

- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- Pinch of mustard seeds
- 1-2 green chillies, chopped
- 6-8 tomatoes, chopped into inch-size pieces
- ½ tbsp ground cumin
- ½ tbsp ground coriander
- ½-1 tsp red chilli powder (based on how spicy you'd like it)
- ½ tsp ground black pepper
- 1 tsp sugar
- ½ tsp salt (to taste)
- 3 tbsp oil
- Handful of coriander, chopped

**1.** In a pan, heat up the oil.

**2.** Once hot, add the cumin seeds and mustard seeds, leaving them to brown slightly and start to pop in the oil, this should be about 2 minutes.

**3.** Add the chopped tomatoes and chillies - be careful as they will splatter as they hit the oil.

**4.** Now add all the spices, the salt and sugar and let the tomatoes really cook. You want to start seeing the oil come to the surface. Leave for about 20 minutes, letting the tomatoes tender up as they soak up the spices.

**5.** Adjust the salt and sugar, and take off the heat. Top with the chopped coriander (if you like). Serve hot.

