

THE CHEF

Diane Forley



Daniel Pelavin

THE subtle interplay of sweet and sour is one of the most beguiling taste experiences there is, and it figures in both of these recipes, traditional preparations that I've twisted just a bit. The London broil is very basic, but the sauce features tamarind, an ingredient widely used in India and the Middle East. The vegetable dish is virtually identical with the Middle Eastern bamia, except that green beans are substituted for okra.

In the restaurant, I use buffalo flank steak, a beautiful cut with just enough marbling to keep the meat from drying out. Since not everyone can get buffalo easily, I've substituted London broil here. Skirt steak also works well. These cuts of meat all require a marinade to impart tenderness

This is the last of eight columns by Diane Forley, the chef and owner of Verbena in Manhattan. Her collaborator has been William Grimes. Next week: the first of eight columns by Daniel Boulud, the chef and owner of Restaurant Daniel in Manhattan.

LONDON BROIL WITH TAMARIND GRAVY

Time: 1 hour 15 minutes, plus 2 hours' marinating

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 onions, sliced
- 1 head garlic, cut in half horizontally
- ½ cup dark brown sugar
- ½ cup champagne vinegar or white-wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- ¼ cup molasses
- 2 tablespoons tamarind paste
- 1 lemon, sliced
- 1 large bunch parsley, roughly chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tablespoon dry mustard
- 10 black peppercorns, crushed
- 8 cardamom pods, crushed
- 2 teaspoons coriander seed, crushed
- 2 quarts chicken stock, canned broth or water
- 2 pounds flank steak
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper.

1. In a large (4- to 6-quart) saucepan over medium-low heat, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil, and add onions and garlic. Sauté, stirring, until onions are golden, 10 to 12 minutes.

2. Add brown sugar to pan, and stir until sugar is melted, about 1 minute. Add vinegar, and cook until reduced by half, about 2 minutes. Stir in tomato paste, molasses and tamarind, and cook 5 minutes. Add lemon,

and flavor. Tamarind is ideal for this because it is innately sweet and sour.

Tamarind comes in different forms: in solid pressed blocks with the seeds still in, in a paste or in a syrup. I like the paste that comes in a jar; the consistency makes it a natural for a barbecue sauce. This sauce is not too heavy, and you can turn up the heat if you like by adding chili peppers.

While a true bamia relies on okra — that's the meaning of the name — not everyone likes the slipperiness of that vegetable. But braised green beans give a similar texture without the slickness. Braising is a nice way

A subtle union of sweet and sour.

to prepare vegetables, one that's often overlooked. A bright green color in beans isn't necessarily a barometer of flavor. Slow cooking retains the nutrients and the flavor; you can lose flavor through blanching.

In this recipe, the initial steaming of the beans is important. It reduces the toughening that may occur with long cooking, and it insures that the beans absorb the tomato flavor. The ideal bean to use is a Chinese long bean, but ordinary string beans work well, too. The apricot acts as a sweetener, and it is perfectly balanced by the acidity of the tomato, which complements the sourness of the tamarind as well.

whole parsley, bay leaf, dry mustard, peppercorns, cardamom, coriander and chicken stock. Simmer until reduced by half, about 45 minutes.

3. Strain the liquid into a large bowl or other container, reserving the vegetables. Let liquid and vegetables cool to room temperature. Spread half the vegetables in a wide, deep dish suitable for marinating the meat. Place the meat on top, and spread remaining vegetables over it. Reserve 2 cups of the liquid, refrigerating until needed. Pour remaining liquid over meat until the steak is completely covered. Marinate the steak in the refrigerator for 2 hours. Bring to room temperature before cooking.

4. In a small saucepan, bring the reserved 2 cups liquid to a simmer to use as gravy. Remove steak from marinade, and pat dry with paper towels. Season both sides with salt and pepper to taste. In a large (12- to 14-inch) skillet over medium-high heat, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil. Add the steak, and cook until medium-rare, 3 to 5 minutes a side, depending on the thickness of the meat. To serve, cut diagonally in thin slices and arrange in overlapping layers around a bed of rice. Spoon the gravy over the meat.

Yield: 4 servings.

STEWED GREEN BEANS WITH TOMATO AND APRICOT

Time: 50 minutes

- 8 dried apricots, quartered
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- ½ pound (about 2 cups) trimmed green beans, in 1-inch lengths
- 1 pound whole peeled plum tomatoes, fresh or canned
- Juice of 1 lemon
- ¼ teaspoon ground coriander.

1. Place apricots in a small bowl, and cover with boiling water. Soak until soft, 15 to 20

minutes. Drain, and set aside.

2. In a medium saucepan over low heat, heat the olive oil and add the onions. Sauté until they begin to turn golden, about 5 minutes. Add the green beans and ½ cup water. Cover, and simmer 10 minutes.

3. Add the tomatoes, apricots, lemon juice and coriander. Replace cover, and simmer until beans are soft, about 20 minutes.

Yield: 4 servings.