



Paneer Butter Masala

Introduction:

Food enthusiasts everywhere know that in today's world, there are many emerging alternatives to eating meat. People concerned with meat production's impact on global climate or animal welfare agree that there need to be more options for a sustainable diet. And with this idea being realized anywhere from vegetarian replacements for meat dishes to sustainable farming and rearing, it is clear that there are many choices. Which one should you pick? One incredible dish that offers a solution to this dilemma is Paneer Butter Masala.

What is Paneer Butter Masala?

Paneer Butter Masala, also commonly called Butter Paneer, is a trademark dish of North India. Made from tomato, onion, sometimes cashews, and a medley of classic spices, this dish is sure to please. The curry portion is created from blending sautéed onion and tomato along with spices like cardamom, cloves, ginger, garlic, chilis, bay leaves, and garam masala. Adding butter to this gives the curry its creamy texture and also reveals how this dish got its iconic name. Paneer, known in North America as cottage cheese, is lightly fried until golden brown, and then mixed into the curry. This protein-dense vegetarian addition provides a tasty juxtaposition to the curry, making this dish a treat to enjoy. We recommend eating Paneer Butter Masala with a side of butter naan or basmati rice.

Is Paneer different from Cottage Cheese?

Paneer and Cottage Cheese are essentially from the same family if you look at it scientifically. The process for creating both starts the same way, by fermenting or curdling milk, but what comes next is the key difference. Cottage cheese is usually strained through a cloth or similar material for about 3 to 4 minutes, whereas Paneer is strained for hours at a time. Though both start the same way, cottage cheese usually has a higher water content making it harder to shape and easier to crumble. Paneer on the other hand, retains a firmer consistency, thus making it easier to shape into the famous cubed chunks we love. Despite this, both options have similar flavors – but if you're looking to try this classic dish in its traditional form, Paneer is necessary as the cubes must be firm. Knowing this, we can define Paneer as the Indian version of cottage cheese. If you are interested in learning more about paneer or paneer dishes, check out our other article on Palak Paneer!



Is Paneer better than Tofu?

Paneer and Tofu, though very similar in appearance, actually have very different origins. Tofu is a fully vegan ingredient made from soy, while paneer is vegetarian and made from milk. If you are wondering which one is better for you, it really depends on your diet and goals.

If you have few dietary restrictions and are looking for the tastiest version of Paneer Butter Masala, paneer is the best choice to go with. Its rich texture and full flavor pair perfectly with this Punjabi delicacy. Paneer is also the right choice if you have a soy allergy, or are looking to cut soy out of your meal plan.

Additionally, for those looking to put on muscle mass from the gym or exercise regimens, paneer is an easy choice for its higher calorie content and protein-dense nature. On average, 100 grams of paneer contains about 18.3 grams of protein, compared to 6.9 grams of protein from the same amount of tofu.

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Tofu, on the other hand, has different benefits. Though taste and texture are sacrificed by replacing paneer with tofu, this alternative is also quite good for you. Tofu is host to many essential vitamins and minerals, such as Vitamin B1 and necessary amino acids, and also has low levels of cholesterol and fats and high levels of iron.

Tofu is also good for cardiovascular health, and so it may be a better option for those concerned with health. Paneer, however, also contains many similar vitamins, minerals, and even iron! However, these levels are slightly less while calories remain higher.

Finally, one issue that may help make a decision for those on the fence, is the sustainability of creating either tofu or paneer. Tofu has recently faced some backlash in the news as researchers say that the soy harvesting that occurs to produce tofu has been linked to many detrimental effects – deforestation to build soy farms and heavy water usage are among the main culprits. Yet tofu is likely still less toxic to the environment than meat production, so it may remain a good choice.

Paneer, an animal product made from cow milk to buffalo milk, could also be seen as bad for the environment if looking at its origins. However, studies show that paneer production in India is mainly limited to traditional dairy sectors, like individual farmers with small herds or property. In this way, paneer production may be better than large-scale and corporate farms that produce much more greenhouse gases and emissions.

Are Paneer Butter Masala and Paneer Tikka Masala the same?

This is a common question we see a lot, but you're in luck – the answer is quite simple! Essentially, Paneer Butter Masala is a sweeter dish in which the chunks of paneer are lightly fried or added raw. This provides the dish a rich and decadent flavour profile. Paneer Tikka Masala, however, is a spicier dish. In this version, the cubes of paneer are usually marinated and cooked on a skewer in a tandoori oven. Both dishes have similar buttery bases, but the spice and cooking process for the paneer is what makes these two unique!