

## Beet Green Palak Paneer

2 tablespoons oil or ghee  
½ pound chopped spinach (can be frozen)  
½ pound chopped beet greens  
½ onion, sliced  
2 tablespoons ginger-garlic paste  
1 cup milk  
½ cup cream  
2 cups or so of paneer, cut into cubes  
The Secret Ingredient (keep reading)

I am an excellent cook. I spend my days thinking up and creating delicious things for me and the people I care about. I enjoy cooking. It's a major part of my life. I can count on one hand the number of times in my life that I have cooked something, and it wasn't delicious. Two of those times have been in attempting to make an Indian curry.

But I desperately wanted to use beet greens in my favorite Indian dish, Palak Paneer (think Saag but not made with just spinach). So, after much research and thinking, I made a decision, and used a secret ingredient. And, after having eaten this delicious dinner of curried greens, I'm satisfied with my decision. You ready? Ok, this may surprise you, but my secret ingredient is a pre-made spice blend. Specifically, National brand "Palak Paneer Recipe Mix for spinach and cheese curry". Yes, it's spelled like that on the box. You might, maybe be able to find this at a very large grocery store, but my suggestion is to find an Indian grocery, and go there. They will absolutely have this mix. It's an incredibly popular brand, and an extremely popular dish. If you have social anxiety like I do, especially in new places where you don't know where anything is, ask the first employee you see where to find it. Rest assured, they are all very nice. There will be a massive wall of spices. It will smell amazing and possibly make you sneeze. Have fun. It's a nice time to get lost reading spice labels for a while. Pick up your paneer while you're there.

Now that you have your secret ingredient, you're basically going to follow the directions on the package. But I did do a few things a bit different that I recommend. My procedure is as follows:

Heat about 2 tablespoons of oil or ghee (another thing you can get at the Indian grocer, and at a much better price than at Publix!) over medium high heat in a large, heavy pot. I used my Le Creuset French oven. The high sides are really nice for what we're about to do. Once the oil is hot, gently drop your paneer cubes in to the oil, taking care that they don't touch each other. Sear them until they are golden brown (You can also do this with pieces of chicken if that's your jam. You do you, booboo.). Once brown, take the pieces out. Add in the onion and give it a minute or two to start cooking down. Then, add in your ginger garlic paste (you can make this by pounding together garlic cloves and fresh ginger in a mortar and pestle. Or buy a jar at the Indian grocer.) and let that all fry together for a few minutes, stirring often.

When the onions are soft, add in your pre-made spice blend. You need to let the spices toast and cook a bit before you add the greens.

Once smelling like Heaven, add in your chopped and VERY thoroughly washed greens (beet greens have a nasty tendency to hold dirt and sand). Sauté everything together for a few minutes, and then cover with a lid to let the greens wilt a bit. Spinach, especially frozen and prechopped spinach, will wilt almost immediately. The beet greens will take longer, but nearly as long as collards or kale would take.

As soon as they're wilted, add in the milk and cream (you could use all skim milk if you wanted to, or a portion of yogurt or kefir instead of the cream. Up to you. My household had a terrible night's sleep and a long day, so I went for the hard stuff.).

Add back in your seared paneer (or chicken) and let the whole thing simmered, uncovered, for about 15 minutes, or until the mixture has thickened a bit. You can blend some of the mix in a blender or use an immersion blender to get a creamier texture if you'd like. I did that, and I'm quite pleased with the result.

Serve with naan and basmati rice (guess where you can buy both of those).

I know this sounds complicated, but it's not really any more complicated than making a soup, or pasta with sauce. It requires a special trip, that's true. But look at that as excuse to go on a mini adventure. You can always order your supplies online if you don't have a grocer near you.

I can say with complete honesty, and without shame, that this is the best curry I've ever made. Does it still count since I used a prepackaged spice blend? I'm going to say yes. I am not so proud as to not admit when I don't have a grasp on something, and the complexity of spice in Indian cuisine is not an area I've mastered, yet. Or rather, I haven't even really gotten any notable skill there. So, until such a time as I can properly season a curry, I will happily trust the experts, and use pre-made curry blends, with only a minimum of chagrin.

As always, enjoy!