Asian Remedies is a London based funded arts and outreach project designed to explore all aspects of domestic life and ritual which enable people to feel and live better. As the project’s title implies it was anticipated that we would gather recipes for individual ailments or to enhance health in particular circumstances such as childbirth or the frailty of old age. As a number of our interviewees told us, ‘food and medicine share the same source’ or ‘food and medicine are one’. Herbs and spices are also seen as having specific healing potency as a corollary to their aesthetic powers.

However, what rapidly emerged was that although specific healing recipes exist in abundance, they do so amid a seamless web of food culture. Nourishment is never just physical. Irrespective of cultural background, the food aesthetics that we learn from childhood are critical in forming socio-political as well as domestic identities. They are therefore as important for nourishing the soul as they are for powering the body.

There is nothing necessarily Asian in this, but people in diaspora develop a different awareness of tradition in their communities. Whereas in Europe and America the rise of scientific medicine and its reach into everyday life has contributed to a widespread interruption of the transmission of traditional remedies and recipes, the migrant communities studied thus far have yielded an unforeseen depth and quality of information.

Below are some recipes we have gathered from our interviewees which demonstrate the range that there is in the collection. What makes these recipes unique is the stories that go with them—personal histories within the greater spectrum of narratives about the Asian diaspora. Please look at www.asianremedies.co.uk where you will find an exciting and ever increasing archive of film, transcripts and remedies for living in the UK. Also, look out for our major exhibition, Routes & Remedies 2006, opening for a week on 29th September at Asia House, London.
Title: Kicheree

Country of Origin: India
Contributors Name: Raju the cook
Route to UK: Orissa > Delhi > London

Purpose/Illness

You always eat this when you are ill, after a fever, elderly, or if you've eaten too much.

Ingredients

One katori [equivalent to a teacup] of basmati rice
One katori moong dahl
Finely chopped vegetables eg beans or carrots
Ghee
A pinch turmeric
A pinch cloves
A stick of cinnamon
A pinch of salt
1 teaspoon of cumin
A pinch of asafoetida
Water

Directions

Wash rice and dahl thoroughly in cold water and soak for two hours in fresh cold water. This is to remove the gas from the dahl [otherwise the dahl will cause flatulence].

Heat a saucepan and put a little bit of pure ghee and add whatever finely chopped fresh vegetables you have. Strain the rice and dahl and stir into the ghee and vegetables. Add water to half a knuckle (finger measurement) over the rice and dahl.

Bring to the boil and simmer for five to ten minutes until the vegetables are softening.
Then, add a pinch of haldi [turmeric], five laung [clove], one stick of dalchini [cinnamon], a little salt and a teaspoon of zeera [cumin] and a touch of hing [asafoetida].

Stir together.

Cook for five to ten minutes with the lid on, checking that the water hasn’t dried from the mixture and stir.

Repeat twice after ten minute intervals.

After half-an-hour it should be very soft and light, serve it in bowls straight away with home made yoghurt in a small side bowl.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Spiders’ webs for minor bruises or cuts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Country of Origin:</td>
<td>Kerala, South India, Tamil Nadu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributors Name:</td>
<td>Parvathi (Paru) Ramanee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Route to UK:</td>
<td>Singapore &gt; Tamil Nadu &gt; London &gt; Buckinghamshire.</td>
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<th>Purpose/Illness</th>
<th>Minor cuts or bruises</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ingredients:</td>
<td>spiders’ web</td>
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<td>gauze for bandage</td>
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Story: For minor things this is the treatment: for a bruise or a small wound, with a toothpick, take the spiders’ web down, and then wrap it round [the wound] binding with a clean, boiled gauze bandage.

<table>
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Treating typhoid in 1942</th>
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Purpose/Illness

Typhoid fever (high fever, contagious disease with a long recuperation period: common treatment in late 20th C is antibacterial therapy with chloramphenical or the sulphonamide co-trimoxazole or the antibiotic amoxicillin)

Story

My sister was only 9 when she got typhoid in 1942. There was a local medical practioner, a compounder, who compounded the medicine, not a doctor but doctor’s assistant. He was the only help we had in the village. There was no Western medicine, and he only had a black bag full of little white pills as big as mustard seeds but he knew which was for what. I don’t know if penicillin had been discovered by then, because I think that’s the treatment for typhoid now. It certainly wasn’t available in the village. The compounder diagnosed the typhoid and said, ‘You have to keep your family away as much as possible’. He said he could come every day and visit the patient, while the typhoid took its course. My sister would have temperatures morning and evening particularly, quite high temperatures, but he also prescribed the diet to give her. He said that on the 14th day the temperature would come down and if it didn’t that is when we should be worried. It might be a little bit raised again in the evening, but in the morning it should be normal, and then it will fade away.

We gave her those white pills with water or a very thin rice gruel. We had our own type of rice then, which we grew ourselves in the village. Each family had their plot. We made what we called parboiled rice, which was processed in a special way. The broken rice was then used to make gruel and a little bit of diluted milk was added. Her diet was very strict; she wasn’t allowed to have too much salt, too much sugar . . . too much anything.

My sister became so weak that she couldn’t manage to walk to the loo. We had borrowed a bedpan from the town, just for her. I had learned how to empty it, because I watched my father doing it when my uncle was ill. I sponged her down because of the high temperature and she had to be cleaned and changed. The bath was very unusual [see separate entry on neem leaves and kadukkai nut] and then I dressed her. All her clothes were washed separately.
Eventually some cooked lentils were added to the gruel, because she was lacking protein. It was still a very bland diet. As she became stronger we added yogurt. The cream having been removed from the milk before making the yogurt.

**Ingredients**

- Rice
- Water
- Milk
- A pinch of salt
- A pinch of sugar

**Directions**

Rinse the rice thoroughly and bring to the boil in water and cook until like a very thin gruel of rice; later diluted milk was added, then the salt and sugar.

Later on in convalescence the patient will be able to keep down cooked lentils [and split mung beans, not red lentils which are hard to digest] and yogurt.

**Title**

**Restorative Congee**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country of Origin:</th>
<th>South China</th>
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<tr>
<td>Contributors Name:</td>
<td>Ye Weiming</td>
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<td>Route to UK:</td>
<td>Guangdong, China &gt; London</td>
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**Purpose/Illness**

For all kinds of illness. When you can’t eat, have a stomach ache or your teeth are no good.
Ingredients

Glutinous rice 225 g
Lean pork 100 g
Yao zhu 瑤柱 (dried scallops) 6
Salt 2 teaspoons
Peanut oil 1 tablespoon
Water 1 litre

Directions

Wash the pork and rub it with salt. Marinate overnight. Rinse the glutinous rice until the water runs clear and marinate in a tsp salt and a tablespoon of peanut oil for half an hour. Boil the water and put in the pork, rice and scallops. Slow to a simmer, checking that the congee doesn’t dry every 10 minutes—until very soft—about 30 to 40 minutes.

Title

Ginger tea

Country of Origin: Calcutta, India
Contributors Name: Nandini Bhattacharya

Purpose/Illness

Coughs, colds and flu

Story

My mother told me if we had coughs we were given cloves to chew and a lot of ginger tea. In winter we were fed a lot of ginger tea, it wasn’t just ginger, it was tea brewed with ginger, tea leaves, cloves and cinnamon.

In fact last week a friend came to spend the weekend. When she arrived she had really bad flu and so I told her don’t try the usual medicines, let me do something for you: so I gave her ginger tea every half an hour, and before she went to bed I gave her warm milk with turmeric in it. She woke up the next day feeling much, much better.
Ingredients

Ginger
Tea leaves
Clove
Cinnamon
Water

Directions

Boil water and make tea as you usually would but with no milk, add 2 cm of skinned and finely chopped ginger, two whole cloves and a cinnamon stick. Leave to infuse for 5 mins, strain and drink immediately.

Title

Neem¹ leaves and Tamarisk

Country of Origin: Kerala, South India
Contributors Name: Parvathi (Paru) Ramanee
Route to UK: Singapore > Tamil Nadu > London > Buckinghamshire.

Purpose/Illness

Bath after severe fever

Story

A tub of cold water is set out to catch the midday sun to heat it up, because although we bathed in cold water, having been ill with a temperature you had to have temperate water to bathe. The same nut, Kadukkai, [Tamarisk] about half the size of walnut, as is used for

¹ Known as Neem tree, nim, margosa tree, Indian lilac (English); Nim, neem, balnimb (Hindi); Nim, neem (Urdu); Nimba (Sanskrit); Vempu (Tamil); Limba (Gujarat); Botanical name: Azadirachta indica of the the mahogany family [Family: Meliaceae]. This shade tree can grow to a height of about 20 to 35 metres, and is found along roads and avenues in the towns and villages of India. Further details at www.plantcultures.org/plants/neem_plant_profile.html (visited 25 November 2005).
a purgative and for asthma. Here it is crushd it very lightly, as you
might tap an egg but taking care not to break it so that the liquid
runs out. You just tap it, to give it a crack and then put it into the
water. You use about half a dozen of them in the tub of water in the
sun and then bathe in that water, sitting under the neem tree, which
also has very special properties. I bathed my sister like this when she
had typhoid. She was nine years old and I was 12. She was the only
one of us who got ill.

Ingredients

Tamarisk [Tamil: kadukkai],
Water heated in the sun

Title

Turmeric and its place in South Indian life

Country of Origin: Kerala, South India
Contributors Name: Parvathi (Paru) Ramanee
Route to UK: Singapore > Tamil Nadu > London > Buckinghamshire.

Purpose/Illness

Antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties

Story

Turmeric is a rhizome and, like ginger (to which family it belongs),
it is the underground root (the rhizome) that is used. It is a showy
plant with lovely leaves and flamboyant red flowers. It grows both in
Tamil Nadu and Kerala, where I come from, and is used for culi-
nary purposes in every savoury dish, almost without exception. I have
even sneaked it into dishes where it does not, strictly speaking, belong.
Two such examples are potato and other raithas, and coconut chutney.

The main reason for using it is the wonderful creamy colour it
lends to many a dish. But it plays a most important part, medicinally
speaking, by acting as an antiseptic both inside and outside the body. Its anti-inflammatory properties have made it very useful in the treatment of Arthritis, for those who seek Nature therapies.

It also aids in the digestion of the many lentils, beans and peas used in South Indian cooking, especially as a high percentage of us tend to be vegetarian. Most of the protein in our diet is obtained from this one source; the other main source being from nuts, locally grown. Milk was not so plentiful or cheap those days in our village as it would be, for instance, in a village in the Punjab. The task of drying the rhizomes and grinding them into powder is a lengthy and laborious process. So, for the most part, commercially sold turmeric powder is used for cooking these days. Growing up in the village I had the opportunity to see it dried for several days in the hot sun, then hand pounded. But as it was a ‘communal’ way of life we led, all such labour was shared equally between neighbours, the children having their fair share of the work cut out!

Turmeric is also used for all auspicious occasions. At weddings, raw rice coated with turmeric was strewn over the bride and groom, much like confetti. The wedding guests were honoured and thanked with turmeric, the holy red powder, bananas and coconut. Invitations sent out for weddings as well as for other religious ceremonies are smeared with turmeric paste on all four corners of the envelope; I received two such envelopes only yesterday!

Finally, turmeric is used widely in cosmetic products, especially for women, because of its depilatory properties. In the village, young girls and older women alike used turmeric root to have smooth and flawless complexions.

Title
Soup for period pains [dysmenorrhea]

Serves No of people: One
Country of Origin: Thailand
Contributors Name: C

Purpose/Illness
To ease period pains in menstruating women
Story: Cannabis leaf\(^2\) infusion for periods...

C: When I had a bad (period) pain my mum boil it and give it to drink. Sometimes it does work.

Interviewer: How do you boil it?

C: Very hot with sugar, sometimes with honey... I told my husband that you boil this one when you sick and he just laugh... .

Interviewer: What effect does it have?

C: It's quite warm and it clear all the stomach, it work quite well.

Interviewer: How much would you have?

C: Not much, just a bit. When you put too much you feel dizzy.

Interviewer: Is it for the pain or for soothing?

C: I think for both because it quite clear and you go it's ok...

**Ingredients**

Cannabis Sativa—one handful of fresh leaves
Water
Honey or Sugar to taste

**Title**

Pak Lang’s Fish head curry

Serves No of people: Four
Country of Origin: Singapore
Contributors Name: Emma Ford
Route to UK: Singapore > Kent

**Purpose/Illness**

To aid memory and give overall feeling of wellbeing

\(^2\) This ingredient is a controlled substance in many countries including the UK and we cannot condone its use.
Story

My uncle is very religious, he’s been to Mecca. I really respect that he’s got that faith. I was not brought up in a religion, although I went to a C of E [Church of England] primary school, but never dabbled in any kind of religion at all. But in Singapore I will go along and celebrate Hiariah, and go to pray at my granny’s grave and things like that. Hiariah, which is like the New Year festival and the breaking of the fast, is quite a big thing in Singapore. In Singapore you’ve also got the festival of light, the Chinese celebrations, it’s so colourful. I love going back there and can’t wait to go again. I don’t feel like it’s very religious, it’s more of a family thing. It’s very family orientated. We all go to my uncle’s house, my aunt’s house and we go around. It does revolve around eating a lot of food. At Hiari, I remember pineapple cake, which is like pastry with pineapple on top. Everyone would bring a dish. My uncle’s speciality is fish head curry. Now he’s re-married and his second wife’s Chinese, so she’ll bring something Chinese. My aunt will bring Satay or some other kind of curry. Everyone brings their own speciality dish. My cousin married an American girl and she brought cheesecake.

Ingredients

One good-sized fish head (I do not know what is available in UK, but I normally use a large red snapper\(^3\) [150–200 gm of a good brand fish curry powder\(^4\), add some water to the curry powder to make a paste.

2.5 cm ginger (scrape the skin off, pound to a paste in a pestle and mortar), blend this with the garlic

4–5 garlic cloves (peeled and crushed)

half an onion, large, diced

4–6 shallots, large, diced

6–8 tablespoon cooking oil

1 teaspoon of mustard seeds (brown or black)

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\(^3\) Mangrove Red Snapper (Lutjanus argentimaculatus (Forsskål); Lutjanidae; Malaysia: Pulau Tioman) standard length: about 16 cm. See http://habitatnews.nus.edu.sg/guidebooks/marinefish/text/307.htm (visited 27 January 2006).

\(^4\) In Singapore you can get curry powder for fish or meat. They are slightly different from each other—the proportion of the ingredients are different.
4–6 cardamom pods
4–6 cloves
1/2 star anise
3–4 cm cinnamon stick
a stalk of curry leaves [available from Indian shops]
5–6 cups of water (variable, determines gravy consistency)
1 tablespoon, heaped, of tamarind powder and add water to extract
the tamarind juice
salt to taste
6–8 ladies fingers (okra)
1 brinjal (aubergine, eggplant), sliced
3–4 medium tomatoes, cut into quarters

Directions

Heat oil in pot until hot [smoking], add onion, mustard seeds, cardamom, cloves, star anise, cinnamon stick and a stalk of curry leaves. Sauté [fry quickly] for a couple of minutes. Carry on frying over a low heat, adding the garlic and stirring all the time for 4 or 5 minutes until the aroma rises. Add about 5–6 cups of water (the amount of water decides the consistency you want the gravy to be). Take about a heaped tablespoon of tamarind and add water to extract the tamarind juice out and add to the gravy. Add salt to taste.

Bring this to boil. Add okra, aubergine, and tomatoes, cook for 3–5, before adding the fish head (as the fish cooks faster than the veggies). Continue to simmer for a further 5 minutes.

It is then ready to be served with hot rice and chutney!!! To garnish, add 4–5 whole green chillies (Incidentally I would eat these to add ‘hotness’ to the curry!!)

Title

Kill it Soup or Soup de Cresson

Serves number of people: One
Name of Contributor: Viv Sanassay
Origin of Recipe: French Mauritian
Route to UK: India > Mauritius > London

For purpose or Illness Colds and flu
Story

It was the one thing I was always guaranteed growing up was their food. Great food. Always. And the one thing he would always do when I was asthmatic and the asthma was brought on by having a cold, a sort of chesty throaty cold would be to say “Darling, leave it with me I am going to cook you soup de Cresson, it will kill it” so from then on it was always known as Kill It Soup and any germ “its going to Kill it!” So he would go in the kitchen and prepare it. He’d be saying “Oh darling it is going to be good, you are going to be killing it, oh god its not going to stay in your body”. There was the French influence as well, you would just sit there and just drink it and you would feel your innards cleansing as you swallowed it. For a start, you would sweat profusely because of the chilli and the heat of the soup, but then you would just feel, starting with your sinuses things clearing and the throat would not itch or hurt anymore, its magic.

Ingredients

1 cup of finely chopped of white onions,
1 table spoon ground nut oil
1 clove of garlic crushed
2 cm grated ginger
juice of a whole lemon
1 pint of boiling water
1 or 2 chopped green chillies
2 handfuls of water cress

Directions

Heat a pan and add the oil, when the oil is hot add the onions, garlic and ginger. Turn the heat down and let the ingredients soften stirring gently. Pour in the water and bring up to the boil add the lemon and the chillies. Simmer gently for 5 minutes then throw in the watercress.

This is a clear soup and should be served hot in a bowl or cup.