

Sheera

Sheera is an Indian dessert or breakfast that is similar to American Cream of Wheat, but it's thicker and a lot more fun. The base is called "sooji" or "semolina" and is easily substituted for quick-cooking Cream of Wheat. I'm not entirely convinced that there's actually a difference between the two.

Sheera can be made into a sweet or savory meal, and both are loved because they're quick to throw together and very comforting. I was told that there is never an excuse not to have dessert when you can have sheera. Here is the recipe for the sweet version, spiced with cardamom and flecked with fried raisins and cashews. Saffron gives it a color and flavor boost, but it's an optional ingredient. When Nanni made this for us, she actually broke out food coloring to tint it a rich yellow! She originally used golden raisins, but I couldn't find any at the store, so I used regular. They are stronger tasting than the golden raisins, but they provide a nice burst of color.



Vegan Yum Yum

Sheera

Makes 4 dessert servings

step 1 Heat water to boiling. A teakettle works great; just heat 2½ cups or so and keep it hot so you can measure out and add 2 cups of hot water to the sooji when you need it.

step 2 Prepare the cardamom by breaking open all of the pods and separating the seeds from the husk. Using a mortar and pestle or the bottom of a glass (or whatever you want), crush the seeds to a fine powder and set aside.

step 3 Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil over medium-high heat in a medium-size pot. Add the cashews and fry, stirring constantly, until golden brown. Remove from the bowl with a slotted spoon, leaving the oil in the pan.

step 4 Add the raisins and fry until they lighten in color and puff up like weird little alien raisins, about 1 minute. Remove them with a slotted spoon, placing them in the bowl with the cashews.

step 5 Turn the heat down to medium, add the sooji, and stir well, until it absorbs the oil and looks like slightly wet sand. Add the cardamom, cashews, raisins, sugar, and saffron (if using) and mix well. Turn down the heat and add 2 cups of boiling water, stirring well. Add the remaining tablespoon of oil and stir until the mixture gets very thick, about 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

Desserts

2 cups boiling water
10 green cardamom pods
3 tablespoons canola oil,
divided into 2 and 1
¼ cup raw, unsalted
cashews
¼ cup raisins (*golden or
regular*)
¾ cup sooji (*or quick-cook-
ing Cream of Wheat*)
½ cup sugar
¼ teaspoon saffron
(*optional*)