



Photo by Anoop Krishnan

Diaspora

The American

Diwali

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Recipe Developer and Food Blogger at Food Without Borders, the author is a "self-trained chef". She was born and raised in India, and moved to New York to study Law and that's where her passion for cooking took shape. On her blog, you will find recipes that are gluten-free, grain-free and processed-sugar free. She likes to think of herself as a global citizen; fascinated by people of different cultures and the food they eat.

I think it's admirable how we Indians worldwide have this ability to adapt to our host country while preserving strong ties to our original culture. This is done through speaking our languages and passing down our cultural values and traditions to the future generations born outside of India. As we all know, a great part of passing on traditions is how Indian festivals are celebrated. So do Indians across the globe, especially in the United States, celebrate Diwali? The answer is a thundering Yes – You bet we do and do it in style!

However, it's a little different from how Diwali looks in India! Diwali is one of those festivals that bring us closer to our culture, and back to our roots. It plays a significant role in our identity of being an Indian. In an Indian household in the US, Diwali is the beginning of a lengthy holiday season... from Diwali to American Thanksgiving, to Christmas, and on into the New Year. Isn't that amazing? Two months of grand celebrations - it's even better than our big fat Indian weddings! Among my friends, Diwali is colloquially known as the "Indian Christmas" and just like Christmas it's usually an intimate affair with family and close friends. Diwali is also a way to introduce our children to the Indian culture and keep them rooted so that they can value those traditions and carry them forward.

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A quintessential Diwali comprises the following: lights – lots and lots of lights; fireworks – the noisier the better, and of course food – all that dieting takes a sabbatical during those four days of celebrations. Indians here are mostly confined to celebrating Diwali or any other major Indian festival during the weekends. When living in another country, the schedule of celebrating holidays revolves around your work schedule. Taking days off on a work or school day to celebrate is rather hard, especially when you would like to include family and friends. So when Diwali falls on a work day, people keep it very intimate. Go to the temple or organise a little puja at home. This year, it's very exciting for my family because Diwali falls on the weekend and our close friends will be visiting us to celebrate it.

While we love celebrating holidays just as enthusiastically as we do in India, there are a lot of things to keep in mind, or might I say, to keep one out of jail. I am really not trying to scare you here but there are a few limitations here. Diwali, being the festival of lights, where diyas and candles are traditionally used to light up your house, are not recommended here. Most houses here are made of some kind of composite material and not concrete – as I like to call it, papier-mâché! Of course, if you live in a condo like me, or apartment, you take your problems to another level! Now, have you ever tried lighting up something made with papier-mâché? Let me tell you, it burns down blazingly fast. We Indians also have a graphic imagination thanks to Bollywood! So here is a scenario for you. Imagine, an Indian couple dressed in colourful attire running out of their big mansion which is ablaze because of those wonderful diyas they made together as an activity for Diwali. Good luck trying to explain that to the Fire Marshal, Police, and the Insurance Company. So to save us from all those theatrics on a special day, we use battery operated tea lights that work just as good as or even better than the traditional ones, and they are 100 percent hassle free.

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Now to the use of firecrackers...here you need special permits and police supervision to do that and honestly, that is one thing I love about my American living; its noise and pollution free. You might think, gosh these things might really dampen your spirits, no Ma'am. Like I have mentioned before, the beauty of living in another country is the amalgamation of multiple cultures.

With the commencing of Diwali, begins the season of Western holidays too. So while the non-Indian folks here start decorating the exterior of their homes with lights right around the time of Thanksgiving, we Indians get a head start with Diwali. Needless to say, the lights and festivities continue until the end of the year, and sometimes into the New Year.

In many states here in the US where there is a large population of Indians, the members of the Indian regional groups, like Gujarati and Punjabi, organise lavish cultural program followed by a splendid dinner. And non-Indians, people from all culture and race are welcome to experience Indian culture and tradition

A TIME TO BOND WITH DIASPORA AND OTHER CULTURES TOO!

For some, who are really far away from family, Diwali has become less about bonding with family and more about staying in touch with the Indian diaspora. And for folks like us, who have family overseas, the Indian community abroad puts up a fanfare of art, music, and dance. And did I forget to mention the FOOD! There is always a mother lode of delicious food and drinks. In many states here in the US where there is a large population of Indians, the members of the Indian regional groups, like Gujarati and Punjabi, plan a lavish cultural program followed by a splendid dinner. Children and adults prepare months in advance for dances and other cultural programs. And mind you, these events are not closed door events, it's a grand event and people of any culture and race are welcome. It also gives other people in the community, non-Indians per say, a chance to learn, participate in, and experience the Indian culture. Importantly, this is also a time for us Indian folks to experience and enjoy foods and traditions from different states of India, other than our native state.

At a philosophical level, Diwali is a festival signifying the victory of good over evil; the lights are meant to bring brightness into your life and usher away the darkness in you. This darkness might be anything, your insecurities that you have been working on or something as simple as trying to improve your life. Whether you are an Indian or not; whether you celebrate Diwali or not; the concept of Diwali simply emphasises the mantra of a fresh start! It's a start of a new year – a year for change, year to love and forgive; a chance to bring out the better version of you.



Snacks On The Go!

Pooja Mohanty shares the art of making the 'oh so heavenly' indulgence

Say goodbye to the boring salted nuts! For the longest time I had this wrong perception that nuts were bad for me, I thought they were just loaded with calories and fat. I, then, read how underrated nuts really are - they are packed with protein, 'healthy fats', vitamins and minerals and if they are maple glazed, come on how can that be bad for you?

This has been my perfect little snack on the go! Whether you have kids who need healthy nutritious snacks or a person like me who has the munchies 15 hours a

day, this is perfect. All you need is a couple of ingredients. If you do a little bit of baking, you probably have it all in your pantry. These nuts remind me of my days in New York. You walk down the busy street and you are captivated by the sweet smell of candied nuts, spiced with cinnamon. They were to die for, however, all good things come with a price and the candied nuts came with tons and tons of calories! When you love something so much and your hand and mouth don't cooperate with your mind, you look for alternatives. So here is my recipe for a guilt free indulgence.

PALEO MAPLE GLAZED NUTS (CASHEW AND PECAN)

INGREDIENTS

- Unroasted Cashew nuts - Raw, unroasted - 2 cups.
- Pecan halves - 2 cups
- Honey - 3 tablespoon
- Egg white from 2 eggs
- Vanilla extract (essence) - 2 teaspoons
- Salt - 1/4 teaspoon

METHOD

- Preheat the oven to 250 F (121.1° C).
- Lightly grease the baking sheet with some nonstick cooking spray or odourless cooking oil.
- In a bowl, whisk the egg whites until they are slightly foamy. You may choose to use a standing or handheld mixer. If using either, it shouldn't take more than 2 minutes.
- To the eggs add the maple syrup, vanilla extract and salt. Mix until well combined.
- Add the nuts and mix them until all the nuts are nicely coated with the egg maple mixture.
- Spread the nuts evenly onto the baking sheet.
- Bake them for 45 minutes while stirring them every 15 to 20 minutes.
- Once cooled completely, it can be stored in air tight containers at room temperature for at least 10 days!

Go nuts over these nuts! You can serve it as a snack or with drinks or even as an additional crunch to your salad. **mbBUZZ**

Happy Diwali



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