

BODY & ENERGY

The Sattvic Kitchen

*Eating like a yogi, from the Bhagavad Gita to the ashram kitchens of Rishikesh: 42
simple vegetarian recipes*



सात्त्विक

sāttvika

YOGIDE

Free sample

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Before you begin

Walk through Rishikesh at midday and you will smell it before you see it: cumin crackling in ghee, rice and mung dal simmering together, fresh chapatis puffing on an open flame. In the ashram dining halls, people sit in rows, a short verse from the Bhagavad Gītā is chanted, and a simple vegetarian meal is served, often in silence. This book brings that kitchen home.

It is a cookbook, and it is also a small book of ideas. The ideas come from the texts that yogis have read for centuries: the Bhagavad Gītā, especially its seventeenth chapter on the three kinds of food, the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā, which gives rules for the yogi's diet, the Upaniṣads, and the classical texts of Āyurveda. The recipes come from the everyday vegetarian cooking of North India, the cooking you find in ashram kitchens and family homes around Rishikesh and Haridwar.

It rests on three promises.

First, it tells you what the texts actually say. When this book says the Gītā describes sātṭvic food as "juicy, smooth, substantial and pleasing to the heart", it gives the verse and our own translation from the Sanskrit. When the texts disagree with each other, or with modern habits, you will read that too. Some of what they say may surprise you.

Second, it makes no health promises. The yoga texts and Āyurveda make many statements about food and health. We report them as what the tradition teaches, clearly labelled. We do not claim that any recipe in this book prevents, treats or cures anything, because no such claim has been tested for these recipes. Sātṭvic eating is offered here as a practice of attention, simplicity and respect, the way it is lived in the ashrams.

Third, the recipes are real and simple. No exotic powders, no superfoods, no supplements. Rice, lentils, wheat, vegetables, fruit, milk, ghee and a handful of spices. Every recipe has been written to be cooked in an ordinary kitchen anywhere in the world.

Your health comes first.

If you have a medical condition, food allergies or intolerances, diabetes, kidney disease, an eating disorder or a history of one, if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if you take medication, talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian before changing your diet significantly or fasting. A vegetarian diet needs some planning for vitamin B12 in particular; ask a health professional. This book contains milk, wheat (gluten), peanuts, tree nuts, sesame and mustard seeds in several recipes; the main allergens are flagged where they appear, but always check your own ingredients.

How to use this book

Chapters 1 to 4 explain the ideas: the three guṇa, what the texts say about food, the ayurvedic view of taste and digestion, and how to eat in a yogic way. Chapter 5 sets up your pantry. Chapters 6 to 10 are the recipes, by time of day and occasion. Chapter 11 explains traditional fasts and their precautions. Chapter

12 gives a seven-day menu. A glossary of Sanskrit and Hindi kitchen words closes the book.

For a deeper look at Āyurveda, its doshas and its daily routines, see our sister site guide-ayurveda.com (in French: guide-ayurveda.fr).

Measurements

Recipes give metric weights and volumes, with US cups in brackets. One cup = 240 ml. One teaspoon (tsp) = 5 ml; one tablespoon (tbsp) = 15 ml. Most recipes serve two to four people. Spice quantities are moderate; sāttvic cooking is gently spiced, not hot.

Chapter 1. Sattva, rajas and tamas on the plate

The three strands

In the philosophy of Sāṃkhya, which underlies the Yoga Sūtra and much of the Bhagavad Gītā, all of nature (prakṛti) is woven from three strands or qualities, the guṇa (गुण). The word guṇa also means "thread" or "strand", as in a rope made of three twisted cords.

Guṇa	Devanagari	Usual translation	In the mind	In food, according to the Gītā
sattva	सत्त्व	clarity, goodness, balance	Calm, light, lucid	Fresh, juicy, nourishing, agreeable
rajas	रजस्	activity, passion, agitation	Restless, driven, craving	Very hot, sharp, sour, salty, burning
tamas	तमस्	inertia, heaviness, darkness	Dull, heavy, confused	Stale, spoiled, left over, impure

The Bhagavad Gītā devotes its fourteenth chapter to the three guṇa. In verse 14.5 Kṛṣṇa says that sattva, rajas and tamas, born of nature, bind the embodied self to the body (our paraphrase). The yogi's aim is not to eliminate rajas and tamas, which is impossible while one has a body, but to let sattva predominate, and eventually to go beyond all three (14.20-14.26).

Why food matters to a yogi

For the tradition, food is not only fuel. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad (6.5.1-6.5.4) teaches that food, when eaten, becomes threefold: its coarsest part becomes waste, its middle part becomes flesh, and its subtlest part becomes mind (manas) (our paraphrase). The same Upaniṣad says a little later (7.26.2) that when food is pure, the mind (sattva) becomes pure, and when the mind is pure, memory becomes steady (our paraphrase of āhāra-śuddhau sattva-śuddhiḥ, sattva-śuddhau dhruvā smṛtiḥ). This sentence is quoted constantly in ashrams. Commentators have understood āhāra both as "food" and, more broadly, as everything we take in through the senses.

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad goes further: in its third chapter (Bhṛgu Vallī, 3.2), the seeker Bhṛgu first realises that "food is Brahman" (annaṃ brahmeti vyajānāt). The body itself is called annamaya kośa, the sheath made of food, the first of the five sheaths described in the second chapter (Brahmānanda Vallī).

None of this is a nutritional claim in the modern sense. It is a way of seeing: what we eat, how we prepare it and in what state of mind we eat it is part of spiritual practice.

Sāttvic, rājasic, tāmasic: a practical reading

Lists of "sāttvic foods" circulate widely, and they contradict each other. Some include onions and garlic, many exclude them; some forbid tomatoes, others use them daily; some praise yoghurt, while the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā lists curd among foods to avoid. This is normal: the tradition is wide, and regional, family

and sectarian customs differ.

The texts themselves classify foods mostly by **qualities**, not by ingredients. That gives us a practical reading:

- **Sāttvic tendencies:** fresh, recently cooked, mild, nourishing, pleasant, moderately seasoned, eaten calmly and in moderation.
- **Rājasic tendencies:** very spicy, very sour, very salty, very hot, dry, sharp, stimulating, eaten in a hurry.
- **Tāmasic tendencies:** stale, reheated many times, spoiled, tasteless, heavy, eaten in excess or without care.

The same dal can be sāttvic when freshly cooked and eaten with gratitude, and tāmasic when reheated for the third day and eaten in front of a screen.

Onion and garlic

Many ashram kitchens in Rishikesh, and many yogic and Vaiṣṇava households, cook without onion and garlic. The Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā lists garlic (laśuna) and asafoetida (hiṅgu) among the foods unsuitable for the yogi (see Chapter 2). All the recipes in this book are written **without onion or garlic**. If you do use them at home, add them as you normally would; nothing else needs to change.

Interestingly, asafoetida (hīṅg), though listed in the Pradīpikā, is today widely used in North Indian sāttvic cooking precisely to replace onion and garlic. We mark it "optional" in our recipes and leave the choice to you.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 42 pages.

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