**The Multiculinary Australian Table**

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## Introduction

I’ve written before on aspects of the making of the Multiculinary Australian Table. But they have all been based on reviewing the story of a particular cuisine - Sri Lankan for example - from recipes, advertisements, or articles about it.

Often in the introduction to a particular recipe recipe maker has assured readers that most in not all of the ingredients, particularly the spices, are available in Australia, or gives substitutes that are available. This is often to encourage the ‘housewife’ to attempt dishes in the cuisine. They usually recommend health food shops and shops that feature the cuisine – Chinese grocers, for example. Arguably the proof of a multiculinary table is that the local generalist store can supply the housewife with a range of ingredients for a particular cuisine/ or cuisines that share enough alternative ingredients to be grouped together.

As a food writer/historian my primary interest is in the cuisines of South Asia - India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh - and South East Asia - Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos - I thought I would see how well my local grocer fared on having the ingredients for my preferred cuisines. I am excluding here meat for which I go to a butcher, fish and shellfish for which I go to a fish market.

## Result of the search

On vegetables they fared reasonably enough for me to cook a meal using them.

Tomatoes, cauliflower, red cabbage, carrots, zucchini, onions, cucumbers, eggplant, silverbeet, spinach, celery, lettuce, spring onions and broccoli. They had bok choy which I counted as South Asian for this exercise. They had tinned okra, dry red and yellow lentils, and chickpeas. Surprisingly to me they had fresh red and green chillies.

On fruits that are a part of South and South Eastern Asia they did reasonably well given it’s an autumn/winter time of year: apples, pears, oranges, avocados, mandarins, grapes, lemons, leeks, stone fruit in season – peaches, plums, nectarines, cherries. They have crystallised slices of mango and pineapple. They have peanuts but not loose. Today they had longans. This week they also have coconuts.

Herbswise they only have fresh coriander. They have dried coriander leaves also. They have big trays of fresh ginger (no galangal) and garlic. They also have vacuum sealed packets of peeled garlic, crushed garlic and powdered garlic. They have powdered ginger.

Of spices they have: cinnamon pounded and quills; dry chillies, powdered chillies and chilli flakes; fenugreek seeds; coriander seeds; cumin seeds; mustard seeds – purple and yellow; turmeric powder; cayenne powder; cloves. They have pre-mixed rogan josh powder and garam masala. They have two curry powders, one in a tin, one in a pact – neither of them Keen’s. The powders are made from the usual powdered spices: coriander, ginger, cumin, chilli, pepper, turmeric, yellow mustard and cardamom. For an unaccountable reason they have pureed tamarind. The have a range of salts – Murray River, natural Australian rock salt, Australian sea salt, Himalayan pink salt, and everyday Saxa Salt.

For cooking oil they have canola, sunflower, vegetable and sesame.

For flavourings they have fish sauce, oyster sauce, black bean sauce, sate sauce, and chillie jam. There are pastes: Malayan laksa; Malayan sambal; Thai green curry; and Nasi Goreng.

They have jasmine rice and basmati, coconut basmati, long grain white, medium grain white rice and black rice. The coconut basmati comes pre-cooked and dried and is revived with a little water and stir fried. They have besan (chickpea) flour – excellent to coat eggplants slices before cooking . There are three kinds of rice paper for wrapping the like of fresh Vietnamese spring rolls: white rice paper, brown rice paper, plain rice paper.

For a cooking liquid they have tins of coconut milk which gives curries that little fillip. Coconut is also available as coconut water.

They have two-minute noodles – beef, oriental, Szechuan chicken, and vegetable noodles. There are chicken noodles wide glass noodles and long life noodles,

And there, sitting by themselves, not showy, are papadums.

## Conclusion

My local grocer evidences South Asian and South East Asian cuisines at the multiculinary Australian table., not by any means to the full extent of the table but sufficient for a curry night home dinner.