

# Put the va-va-voom back into your veg

Being vegetarian or vegan can cut your cancer risk by up to 25%, so here Indian chef and author Camellia Panjabi shares her culinary secrets

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14 Aug 2025

It is no understatement to call Camellia Panjabi the queen of Indian food. Not only did she help create landmark London restaurants Veer-aswamy, Amaya, Chutney Mary and the Masala Zone chain, her first book 50 Great Curries of India is the best-selling curry cookbook in the world.

Now Mumbai-born Camellia, who was awarded an MBE in 2013, is putting vegetables in the spotlight, showcasing the delicious, surprising and vibrant ways of cooking humble produce to ensure it's the star of your meal.

The timing couldn't be better, as a US study of 80,000 people recently found that vegetarian and vegan diets can significantly reduce the risk of certain cancers including

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colorectal and stomach.

She says her own taste for “unbelievably well-made vegetables” came from her grandmother, who had

come to Mumbai from Karachi during partition in India in 1947, and this formed the foundation for her appreciation of vegetarian food.

She explains that an Indian meal consists principally of rice or roti with a little meat sometimes (if non-vegetarian), plus one root vegetable, one other vegetable, lentils (dal), and usually a small serving of yogurt.

“This is a selection of recipes from all over India, covering as many varieties of vegetables and lentils as possible, as well as savoury dishes made from fruits, and dishes from times past and present,” she says. But take note. “The recipes are adaptable. Nothing in Indian food is fixed or meant to be just so, the way recipes are for, say, pastry or mayonnaise.

“You can always adjust recipes to suit your palate, keeping in mind the balance of flavours – salty, spicy, sweet and sour.”

■ ■ Pre-order *Vegetables: The Indian Way* by Camellia Panjabi (Penguin, out August 28) now. Photography by Jonathan Gregson 2025.

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