



Madhur  
Jaffrey

Curry  
Easy

Vegetarian

Kaveri Ponna's  
**Kodava Mushroom Curry**  
with Coconut *Kumme Curry*

I cannot tell you how scrumptious – and simple – this curry is. I had never eaten it before in my life until Kaveri made it for me in her large, beautiful modern home in Bangalore, replete with vaulted ceilings and two kitchens, one for Kaveri, who is a food writer, and one for the staff. She and her husband, Naresh, are both from Coorg (the British name, but now referred to frequently as Kodagu, its original name) where they have vast holdings that include coffee plantations and tracts of the forested, mountainous wilderness that this area is famous for.

Many of the Kodavas are of the Kshatriya or warrior caste and, perhaps not so strangely, have risen in the ranks of the Indian army to gain the highest positions. Kodavas are not vegetarians, but they have such unusual vegetarian dishes that I had to travel up and down Coorg to learn more.

Traditionally, the people here are farmers (rice grows in the valleys), but they are also hunter-gatherers because their misty land in the mountainous Western Ghats of south-western India is filled with game and fish. The British called it India's Scotland. They grow cardamom, coffee and black pepper, and some shops in Madikeri, the capital city, specialize in selling just those three items. They have wonderful honey, which is also sold in the Madikeri market. The forests provide wild mangoes and bitter oranges, and in the very wet, four-month rainy season, it is the wilderness that provides the hunter-gatherers with most of their fresh produce. At this time it bursts over with bamboo shoots (which mysteriously disappear every 60 years and then slowly regenerate), wild greens such as ferns, colocasia (they cook the tender leaves while they are still uncurled), and many, many varieties of mushrooms.

The wild mushrooms, with names such as *nucchie kumme* and *aalandi kumme*, range from tiny ones that carpet the forest floor to wood-ear types that grow on tree trunks and those that look like petalled flowers. The largest ones, *nethelē kumme*, can grow to the size of a large dinner plate, and are simply roasted over wood and seasoned with salt, lime juice and crushed green chillies (see my version, Grilled Portobello Mushrooms in the Kodaga Style, page 34).