



Mumbai: Ingenuity is the new tool with which housewives are cooking meals these days. Paring the use of expensive onion and tomato, homemakers across the city are crushing cabbage and boiled potato into their gravies to thicken them. Others are using curd, cornflour or chickpea flour. Defiant ones are experimenting with new ingredients like powdered masala to turn the kitchen into one big picnic.

The hydra-headed monster of inflation is causing ripples even within those households that do not ordinarily count their consumption pattern. As one curbs the use of one expensive item like onion, its close alternative tomato rears to bite. The Rs 60 scourge has hit the middle class with a single kilogram of onion, tomato, lady finger, French bean, cluster bean and cauliflower all costing that much.

Diluting the use of expensive ingredients has become commonplace across the city with homemakers forced to choose cheaper alternatives. Crushing cabbage or boiled potato into gravies to thicken consistency works for several families, while others blend a teaspoon of cornflour or chickpea flour (besan). Curd is a good option because it lends tang as well as body, says Sharmeen Ansari from Juhu. So is cream.

Bengali cuisine offers a host of alternatives that do not require onion so lecturer Shraboni Sarkar frequently prepares fish curry in mustard gravy or vegetables cooked in a simple watery mix of onion seed, asafoetida and cumin. The Iskcon kitchen at Juhu traditionally uses asafoetida to replace the flavour of onion and garlic.

Spirited individuals who enjoy experimenting with their food have simply turned their indulgence in another direction. Media professional Abhilash Kamath, who likes to cook for his wife and children, has discovered the joys of ready-to-cook powdered masala that is economical and makes a perfect gravy. The party begins at 9 am on Sunday, he laughs. I marinate meat the night before and wake up to the joys of Suhana meat masala which sits perfectly on the palate without much effort. All one has to do is pour enough water to make a light or thick gravy, and sprinkle coriander.

With onions selling at Rs 38 per kg in the wholesale market, Chetana Thali Restaurant at Fort has devised starters like cabbage or corn pakora, kaju kothimbir wadi and aloo bhajiya, and drafted into its main course dishes like cluster bean in green sauce and drumstick in sesame seeds. My onion supplier said that selling at our annual contracted rate of Rs 14 per kg was

Innovative citizens cut onions to size

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killing him, says owner Vivek Bhanushali. I decided to pay him Rs 38, but reduced consumption to cushion the blow for both of us.

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