



August 18, 2017

5 Chef-Approved Ingredients that Will Make Your Next Meal Way Less Boring



Jet-setting chef Manish Mehrotra shares his favorite ingredients.

Manish Mehrotra is a true globe trotter: he splits his time between New Delhi, [New York](#), and soon, London—the three locations (with London opening up later this year) of his award-winning Indian fine dining spot, [Indian Accent](#). His dishes, accordingly, dip their toes into cuisines from all around the world: pulled pork phulka tacos, Thai pomelo segments with tamarind and roast cashews, goat cheese kebabs with pickled chilies.

Mehrotra's pantry, however, is a return to his roots, and to all of the spices, powders, and sauces he has loved since he was a kid (plus a few acquisitions from when he was a young cook in east Asia). When he cooks at home in Delhi for his family, those seasonings are deployed in some variation on an Indian staple like dal, sabzi, or, his all-time favorite, bhel puri (a sweet and sour puffed rice salad). When he's at his place in New York, he's not afraid to mess around a little more—mixing his coconut powder into crab cakes, or spreading tomato pickle on top of [burgers](#). Indian cuisine, he says, is heavily reliant on good-on-everything condiments that make experimentation very easy—hence the sauce-packed pantry.



August 18, 2017

Take a look at those five essential flavor savers that the worldly chef loves to keep around.

Salty, Sour Masala



“This is my universal spice. It is capable of working wonders in so many different kinds of dishes. It’s a finishing masala—meaning it’s not meant to be cooked with—and it adds this slightly peppery, salty, sour flavor. It works well on salads, fresh fruit, and believe it or not, [cola](#).”

MDH Chunky Chat Masala, [\\$2 on Amazon](#)

Not-Too-Fishy Oyster Sauce



“When I come back home at 1 or 2 o’clock in the morning, I will often make a stir fry, and the only flavoring I need is this oyster sauce. I take out some prawns or some fish, add this sauce, some vegetables, and whatever the result is tastes excellent and full-flavored. It’s not too fishy, very pleasantly savory, and works equally well as a marinade for grilling.”

Lee Kum Lee Panda Oyster Sauce, [\\$11 on Amazon](#)

Instant Pure Coconut



“Coconut is one of my all-time favorite ingredients. My wife is from south India, so it is something we always have in the house. This powder gets you that coconut flavor instantly, and it’s neutral enough to work in both sweet and savory dishes. I will mix this with crab and mayonnaise to make crab cakes, or use it to make a Thai or a south Indian curry. It also makes a great mango coconut lassi. The flavor is really strong, and it’s also very natural. It doesn’t taste synthetic like a lot of coconut products out there.”

Maggi Coconut Milk Powder, [\\$16 on Amazon](#)

Deep, Earthy Tomato Sauce



“My go-to sauce for any kind of sandwich. It consists of pickled tomatoes and chilies, with the chilies added not for spiciness, but to create this deep, earthy flavor. I’ll mix it with Greek yogurt to spread into a burger or a hot dog, or I’ll just simply roll it into a chapatti. The mix of savory, sour, and spice is so satisfying.” *Priya Tomato Pickle, [\\$6 on Amazon](#)*

Extra Crispy Topping



“I love fried shallots. I put them on everything, from risotto to biryani to noodles. But with most brands I have tried, the shallots tend to wilt, are too bitter, or are not crunchy enough. I discovered this brand in a Chinese grocery store, and they are some of the best fried shallots I’ve had — perfect for adding that instant sweet, fried flavor and extra crispy texture. When I travel, I always carry them with me.” *Fried Shallots, [\\$4 at Temple of Thai](#)*

