Drinks / India

Lassi

Punjab's cooling yogurt drink — thick, tangy dairy whipped with cold water until frothy and pale, offered sweet with rose water and saffron or savory with roasted cumin and black salt; the perfect antidote to any spiced meal.

Time 10 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 300 g Whole-milk plain yogurt (full fat)
- ☐ 150 ml Cold water or ice cubes
- ☐ 25 g Sugar or honey (sweet version)
- ☐ 10 ml Rose water (sweet version)
- ☐ 0.2 g Saffron threads (sweet version)
- ☐ 15 ml Warm milk, 1 tbsp (for blooming saffron)
- ☐ 3 g Roasted cumin powder / jeera (savory version)
- ☐ 2 g Black salt / kala namak (savory version)
- ☐ 8 g Fresh mint leaves (savory version)
- ☐ 5 g Fresh ginger, grated (savory version)
- ☐ 10 g Crushed pistachios (sweet) or fried cumin seeds (savory)
- ☐ 1 g Ground cardamom (sweet version)

Let's make it.

01 For the sweet lassi version: combine the saffron threads with the warm milk (about 50°C — very warm but not scalding) in a small cup. Crush the threads very gently between your fingers as you add them. Stir and leave to bloom for 5 minutes. The milk will gradually turn a vivid golden-orange, and the room will fill with the unmistakable floral-honeyed scent of saffron. This blooming step maximizes color and flavor extraction — saffron threads added directly to cold yogurt release far less of their compounds. If making savory lassi, skip this step entirely.

02 For sweet lassi: combine the yogurt, cold water or ice cubes, sugar, rose water, cardamom, and the saffron-infused milk in a blender. For savory lassi: use yogurt, cold water, roasted cumin powder, black salt, fresh mint leaves, and grated ginger instead. Blend at high speed for 60 full seconds. The key to lassi's characteristic frothy, aerated texture is blending at high speed long enough for air to be incorporated — do not stop at 20 seconds. The mixture should go from pale white-yellow to a visibly paler, frothier consistency as air is whipped in. A traditional Punjabi method uses a hand-churner (mathani) for even longer to achieve a deeply frothy result.

03 Taste the blended lassi immediately. Sweet version: adjust sugar upward if too tart (yogurt acidity varies significantly by brand), add a touch more rose water if the floral note is absent, or a pinch more cardamom for warmth. Savory version: the kala namak (black salt) is crucial — it provides a distinctive sulfurous egg-like quality that is characteristic of salted lassi and should be perceptible but not overpowering. Add more cumin if the drink tastes flat. For both versions, the balance of sweet or savory against the natural yogurt sourness is the key. Taste several times — adjustments change the drink dramatically.

04 Pour the lassi immediately into pre-chilled tall glasses or clay cups over a generous handful of ice. The froth is the most prized part — pour carefully to preserve as much foam on top as possible, rather than directly onto the ice where the bubbles will collapse. For sweet lassi: garnish with a pinch of crushed pistachios, a light dusting of ground cardamom, and a few extra saffron threads laid across the foam. For savory lassi: float a few whole mint leaves on the foam, dust with a pinch of roasted cumin, and add a light sprinkle of black salt. Serve immediately — lassi waits for no one.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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