

Red lentil dhal

Serves 4

A good dhal is the basis of many a brilliant meal. You can add as many vegetables to it as you wish and that, topped with yogurt and cucumber, is a feast in itself, or serve it with a vegetable curry. When the wild garlic is in season I add that to the mix but at this time of year (June) I add a couple of leaves of shredded chard or spinach.

- 250g red lentils
 - 1 onion, finely chopped
 - 4 green cardamoms
 - 2 tbsp oil
 - 4-6 cloves and 1 tsp cumin seeds
 - a handful of young spinach, chard or wild garlic leaves
 - Fried onions and freshly chopped chilli for garnish (optional)
1. Wash the lentils in a sieve and shake dry. Finely chop the onion and crush the cardamom pods lightly.
 2. Heat a pan, add the oil with the cardamom, cloves and cumin and cook for a few seconds until fragrant, then add the onion. Cook, covered, over a low heat for 5 minutes, until the onion is softened.
 3. Add the lentils with sufficient water to cover them by about 1cm. Bring to the boil, then cover and simmer for 15-20 minutes, until the lentils are tender. Add a little more water during cooking if necessary. Beat the lentils frequently to make them creamy.
 4. Wash the leaves and shred them finely. Beat the lentils again, add the leaves and leave for a minute or two to wilt. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve with curries, or just with some vegetables and chutney.

Top tips:

- If making a lot of dhal you can boil the lentils first and then add them to the onions and spices. However, if you do it this way, don't overcook the lentils or your dhal will be too wet.
- Dhal can be thick enough to stand a wooden spoon up in - or it can be almost soup like. I prefer the former but you might decide some pulses make a better thin dhal than thick - they all have different flavours and are worth trying.

- Ring the changes with your spices too - fennel and fenugreek seeds are both great in dhal.
- Some people add asafoetida to lentils and other pulses to help mitigate wind... Add a pinch with the other spices if you wish to use it