

23a Tarka Dal

Dal (sometimes spelt dhal) is the Indian word for lentils and tarka is the hot spiced oil that is poured on top to flavour the pot of cooked lentils.

Serves 4-6

Ingredients

250g red lentils
850ml cold water
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
small chunk fresh ginger thinly sliced (no need to peel)
1 teaspoon salt or to taste
3 tablespoons light olive oil (or other flavourless oil)
2 large cloves garlic peeled and finely chopped
1 teaspoon ground coriander
pinch chilli flakes
1 teaspoon whole cumin seeds

1. Put the red lentils, water, ground turmeric and slices of fresh ginger into a large saucepan and bring to the boil, carefully spooning off the froth that appears.
2. Turn down the heat, place the lid on the pan ajar and simmer for 25-30 minutes until the liquid is absorbed. Stir with a wooden spoon from time to time, especially towards the end of the cooking time. The end result should be a runny porridge-like mixture.
3. Remove the ginger slices and season the dal with salt. Turn the heat down to very low while you prepare the tarka, the spiced oil mixture.
4. To prepare the tarka, heat the oil over medium heat in a small frying pan. Add the chopped garlic to the pan and stir with a wooden spoon until it turns a pale brown colour.
5. Add the ground coriander, chilli flakes and cumin seeds to the pan, allow to sizzle for about 30 seconds then pour the hot tarka mixture over the dal, and stir just a little to swirl it through the mixture.
6. Serve the dal with boiled basmati rice and Greek-style natural yoghurt for a simple Indian-style vegetarian meal.
7. If you want to take the meal up to the next level then serve with a basmati rice pilaf rather than plain boiled rice and add some chopped fresh herbs (coriander and mint are good) plus some seasoning to the yoghurt to make a raita (Indian yoghurt relish).