

Cooking Together Recipe: Dal Chowder with Salsa

The word *dal* (also spelled daal or dahl) comes from the Sanskrit phrase “to split” and refers to a soup-like preparation of split peas, beans, or lentils, which are staples in Indian cuisine. The practice of milling beans to split them must have been invented by a culinary wizard, as split peas or beans are quicker to cook and easier to digest than whole ones.

The consistency of a dal varies according to its intended use. A thinner dal may be served as a first course, and a thicker more substantial dal, such as this one can be served as an entrée or a meal in itself. This dal chowder recipe was inspired by a co-worker who had had a dental surgery and asked me to prepare her a soft, nourishing soup at work. I invented this recipe, at the co-op, with minimal cooking facilities, limited time, and ingredients, including a left- over salsa from a previous day. This has become my favorite quick soup!

For Dal Chowder

4 cups water
1 cup red lentils, thoroughly rinsed with hot water and drained
1 tablespoon oil
1½ cup *cooked* tomato salsa (use the recipe below or any store-bought salsa)
1 tablespoon ginger root, finely chopped
1 cup corn kernels, fresh or frozen
Juice of ½ lemon
Salt to taste
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First prepare the cooked salsa. If you have a store bought or home- made salsa in the refrigerator that will do too. To prepare the salsa, place the tomatoes into a pot of boiling water for a few minutes until their skins split. Transfer them to a bowl of cold water, peel them after they cool and cut them into chunks. Place the tomato chunks, peppers, cilantro, onion and water into a jar of a food processor and blend the mixture into a coarse puree. Next, heat 1 to 2 tablespoon of oil in a saucepan and add the tomato puree mixture. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes until the sauce becomes somewhat thick. Add the salt to your taste. You will only need 1½ cup of salsa for this soup recipe. The remainder portion can be refrigerated for a future use.

To make the soup, bring the water to a boil in a pot and add the rinsed lentils. Simmer over medium heat for 15 minutes. Then whisk the lentils to break them down.

In a separate pan, heat a tablespoon of oil. Add the ginger and stir-fry for a minute. Next, add 1½ cup of the salsa and corn kernels to the pan and sautee for 2 minutes. Add this mixture to the pot of lentil. Simmer the soup for 5 -7 minutes. Add lemon juice and additional salt, if needed. Serve hot with rice, tortillas or bread.

NOTE: I like this soup with some texture. For very soft soup, puree the dal in a processor for 2 minutes. Serve hot.

Makes four to six servings

This recipe was modified from Shanta's cookbook "Cooking Together: A Vegetarian Co-op Cookbook".

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