

Cooking up Culture



Sri Lankan Dhal Curry
by Harshini Amaratunga



“Every family in Sri Lanka would make this dish every day with every meal (breakfast, lunch and dinner). My grandmother made this dish for her family, my mother made it for my family and now I make it for my own family.

“The smell of the dhal curry reminds me of when I was with my grandmother in the country, south of Sri Lanka, during my school holidays. I liked to watch her mix in the ingredients and learnt to cook from her.”

Ingredients

First ingredients

2 cups split red lentils, washed and rinsed in cold water at least 3 times to remove starch

1½ teaspoons turmeric

¼ teaspoon fenugreek seeds

1 sprig of curry leaves

Pandan leaf-4 inches piece cut into 3

1 cinnamon stick

2 teaspoons salt

¼ teaspoon raw Sri Lankan curry powder

½ small red onion, sliced

1 green chilli, chopped and de-seeded

Second ingredients

1 cup light coconut milk

1 tablespoon coconut oil

½ teaspoon mustard seeds

2 cloves garlic

3-4 whole dried red chillies, seeded

¼ onion, thinly sliced

1 sprig curry leaves

Method

Serves 4

Cover the washed lentils with cold water by 1cm. Add all first ingredients and bring to the boil. Stir regularly and check if the lentils are soft. Add coconut milk.

In a separate small pot, put 1tbs coconut oil and fry mustard seeds until they begin to pop followed by the remaining second ingredients. Add the small pot to the lentils, continuing to stir regularly and checking to see if the lentils are cooked and soft.

Once soft, reduce heat and simmer for 3 minutes.

Throughout Sri Lanka there are many different variations of Dhal. I prefer to make it a lighter yellow colour and serve it with dried chillies on the top. Some people prefer it darker, with more curry powder. It can be eaten with roti, bread, rice and combined with other curries as well.