

Creamy Dhal with Turmeric-roasted Cauliflower

This Thomasina Miers recipe is one of our favourite vegetarian dishes of all time. The luxurious addition of cream is inspired. It's incredibly versatile and works either as a main course in its own right, served with rice, naan & mango chutney, or in combination other Indian vegetable dishes. As a side it's also great with salmon or lamb. The ingredients list looks long, but nothing is hard to source and you may already have several, if not all, of the spices in your cupboard.



DETAILS

- Prep Time: 15 minutes
- Cook Time: 45 minutes (plus 45 minutes if using dried lentils)
- Serves: 4 as a main dish, 6 as a side dish

INGREDIENTS

- 400g brown or black lentils such as beluga (I usually buy them ready cooked)
- ½ cinnamon stick
- 1 dried red chilli
- 1 bay leaf
- salt
- 40g butter (or vegan spread)
- 1 tbsp rapeseed oil
- 1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 3cm piece of fresh ginger, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 tbsp garam masala
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 200ml double cream (or 160ml can of coconut cream if vegan)

For the spice mix:

- ½ tbsp cumin seeds
- 2 cloves
- 1 heaped tbsp. coriander seeds
- 4 green cardamom pods
- 1 star anise, roughly broken up
- 2-3 pinches dried chilli flakes
- 1 tsp fennel seeds

For the Cauliflower:

- 1 small head cauliflower, broken into florets, leaves reserved
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 2 tbsp rapeseed oil

To serve:

- 1 fresh red chilli, finely chopped
- 1 big handful of coriander leaves, roughly chopped

METHOD

If using dried lentils, rinse them in cold water and tip into a large pan with the bay leaf, cinnamon and chilli. Cover with plenty of water and a heaped teaspoon of salt, bring to a simmer and cook for 40-45 minutes, until the lentils are completely soft but still keep their shape.

Easy version: I'm lazy and use 500g of ready cooked Beluga lentils, warmed up in the microwave according to the packet instructions. I don't add the salt, chilli, cinnamon or bay, but you could certainly add a pinch of chilli flakes and a tsp of both salt and ground cinnamon to the warm lentils if you like.

Heat a dry frying pan over a medium heat. When hot toast the spice mix ingredients for a few minutes, stirring constantly, until fragrant. Discard the cardamom husks before grinding in a spice grinder to a fine powder.

Heat the oven to 220°C/200°C Fan/425F/gas7. Melt half the butter (or vegan spread) and the oil in a deep casserole dish. Fry the onion for 5 minutes until it begins to soften. Add the garlic and ginger, and cook for a further 3-4 minutes. Stir in the spice mix, garam masala and ground cinnamon and, a minute later, the tomato paste. Gently fry for 3 minutes, then stir the (drained) lentils into the pan. Add enough water to create a thick, soup-like consistency, bring back up to heat and taste, adding more salt if needed. Cover with a tight fitting lid and bake in the oven for 30 minutes.

Line a baking tray with foil. Toss the cauliflower florets and leaves with the turmeric, oil and a teaspoon of salt, then turn out onto the tray. Roast in the oven along with the dahl for 20-25 minutes until crisp and golden in parts.

Once the cauliflower is cooked, remove everything from the oven. Stir the cream (or coconut cream) and remaining butter (or vegan spread) into the lentils and check the seasoning again.

Spoon the dhal into bowls, top with the roasted cauliflower, sprinkle with the fresh chilli and coriander, and serve.

