

Nepali people often eat dal bhat [lentils and rice] twice a day, mid-morning and early evening, often with tarkari [curried vegetables]. If you're feeling really adventurous, you and your guests could eat it with your right hands in true Nepali style!

LENTIL SOUP [DAL]

Preparation time: one hour soaking, forty minutes cooking.

Servings: four to five.

Ingredients: one cup of lentils; two tablespoons of oil; one chopped onion; three crushed garlic cloves; one 2cm-long piece of crushed ginger; half a teaspoon of turmeric; and one and a half teaspoons of salt according to taste.

Procedure: Wash the lentils and soak for up to an hour. Soaking is not essential but soaked lentils cook faster. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a pot and fry the onion until it is golden brown. This gives a good flavour. Add the drained lentils, garlic, ginger, turmeric and salt and stir well. Add enough water to cover the lentils and cook until the lentils are soft and like a soup. Check as the lentils are cooking and add more water as necessary to make the soup the desired consistency. Nepali people prefer a fairly thick lentil soup about the consistency of a pancake mixture. Serve poured over the rice, or as a soup in a separate small bowl.

RICE [BHAT]

Preparation time: twenty to thirty minutes.

Servings: four to five.

Ingredients: two cups of rice; and half a teaspoon of salt.

Procedure: Measure two cups of rice into a heavy-bottomed pot. Wash the rice until the water runs clean. Add boiled water. The level of the water should be 2.5cm above the surface of the rice. Add half a teaspoon of salt, more or less according to taste. Bring to the boil and boil rapidly uncovered, until the water disappears from the surface of the rice. Turn the heat down very low and cover the pot with a lid. Continue cooking on a low heat until the rice is cooked. The total time will vary from fifteen to twenty-five minutes. When cooked, gently toss the rice with a fork and replace the lid on the pot until you are ready to serve the rice.

CURRIED VEGETABLES [TARKARI]

Preparation time: two hours.

Servings: four to five.

Ingredients: two to three tablespoons of oil; two chopped onions; half a teaspoon of cumin powder; one teaspoon of coriander powder; three crushed garlic cloves; one 2cm-long piece of ginger; half a teaspoon of turmeric powder; a pinch of chilli powder; a quarter of a teaspoon of pepper; one teaspoon of salt; four to six large cubed potatoes; half a small cauliflower, split into florets; two cups of sliced green beans; two cups of chopped aubergines; and three quartered tomatoes [apart from the potatoes, the vegetables may be varied according to the season].

Procedure: Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed pot and fry the onion until it is golden brown. Stir in the cumin, coriander, garlic, ginger, turmeric, chilli powder, pepper and salt. Add the potatoes, cauliflower, beans, aubergines and tomatoes. Turn the vegetables over to coat them with the oil and spices. Cover and cook over a low heat until all the vegetables become tender, turning them gently from time to time.

Delicious served with pappadums, lime pickle, flash fried spinach and spicy tomato chutney.

