

Spinach Dal

Serves 4-6

1 1/2 cups red lentils. The tiny red lentils in the bulk section of the coop work very well.
4 cups water
2 whole dried chilis
1/4 teaspoon turmeric
1/2 teaspoon salt
vegetable oil
1 bunch spinach, washed, not baby spinach
1/2 teaspoon cumin seeds, whole
1 cup onion, chopped
1-2 teaspoons chopped ginger root
1 Tablespoon lemon or lime juice
1 teaspoon garam masala, optional

1. Wash the lentils several times and drain well. Put them in a medium sized pan with the water, and add chilis, turmeric, and salt. Bring to a boil, and skim off foam that rises to the top. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, for about ten minutes. Stir frequently, and taste after ten minutes – lentils should be tender and starting to fall apart. Once cooked, cover and set aside. Larger lentils will take more time to cook, and watch to add more water if necessary.

2. In a skillet, heat 1-2 Tablespoons vegetable oil. Once hot, add cumin seeds, and allow them to sizzle and foam until aromatic, about 30 seconds. Add onion and cook until onion is soft. Add ginger. Take spinach leaves and gather them into a roll on the chopping board, and chop well. Add to onion and stir. Cook until they are just cooked through – about 3 minutes.

3. Add the spinach to the lentils, check for salt, and maybe add another 1/2 teaspoon. Add lime juice and garam masala to taste. Garam masala can be passed at the table as an alternative. Offer lime wedges for serving, also.

4. Serve with rice or potatoes.

Notes: If you like thicker dal, use less water – only 3 cups, but watch the pan very closely and add more water if necessary. Chard is a fine alternative to the spinach, or you could use some of both. Use the chard stems, but separate them from the leaves, chop them small, and add them to the onion first. Put a lid on the skillet, add a little water if necessary, and cook for several minutes. Add the chopped chard leaves and cook another few minutes with a lid on the skillet. Spinach would go in last. Frozen spinach works OK – don't cook it separately. Just thaw it partially to chop it before putting it in, put a lid on the pan, and make sure it is heated through.

This recipe scales up very well. I made three times the amount, but used a heavy soup pot, because it's challenging to get the lentils to soften evenly. It took them 15-20 minutes to cook, instead of ten. I made it with lots of fresh chard, one bunch of fresh

spinach, and some frozen spinach. A rice cooker was extremely helpful for making the rice for a group. I am working on not getting too attached to my rice cooker.