

LENTILS

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Every Sunday, my father would take all the leftover lentils (nothing was ever wasted), put them into one pot and cook them in the back garden. All the neighbours' children would play in the back garden, and my father would feed our family and anyone else who happened to pop-in. This was in the era when you didn't need to be invited - you just dropped in!

The reason that this takes me back to my school summer holidays, was that for all six weeks we cooked a huge variety of food which was grown in our back garden or bought from the corner shop. This particular dish sticks in my mind as a real favourite.

Punjab Five-Jewel Creamed Lentils (Panch Ratan Dal)

Panch ratan means 'five-jewels'. This classic recipe calls for five varieties of lentils.

INGREDIENTS:

50 g urad dal (white lentils)	8 cloves of garlic, minced
50 g chana dal	10 g fresh ginger, minced
50 g masoor dal (red lentils)	5 green chillies, slit into halves
50 g toor dal (oily/waxy lentil)	3 tsp kasuri methi (dry fenugreek leaves)
100 g green moong or mung dal	2 tbsp fresh tamarind paste
1 tsp turmeric	Zest and juice of one large lemon
1/2 tsp asafoetida	1 small bunch coriander including the stalks, chopped
25 g ghee or clarified butter	For tempering (optional)
1 tsp asafoetida	5 whole dry red chillies
2 tsp brown mustard seeds	2 thinly slice garlic cloves
2 tsp cumin seeds	10 g ginger, julienned
1 tsp nigella seeds	2 green chillies, slit length ways
2 tsp crushed coriander seeds	1 tsp cumin seeds
2 tsp fennel seeds	1 tsp brown mustard seeds
1 large onion, thinly sliced (for great results use a mandolin)	Salt to taste
6 fresh ripe tomatoes, chopped finely	8 fresh curry leaves, chiffonaded
200 ml coconut cream	2 tbsp of ghee or clarified butter
	1 large onion, cut into thin rings (use a mandolin)

METHOD:

Wash the lentils in warm water until the water runs clear. Soak in cold water overnight, then drain.

Using a heavy-bottomed saucepan, add the drained lentils along with 900ml of water. Bring to the boil and remove any starch that appears to the surface. Now add the turmeric and ½ tsp of the asafoetida. Cover and simmer until the lentils are cooked completely.

Using a wide sauté pan, heat the ghee until hot, then add the remaining ½ tsp of asafoetida, brown mustards seeds, cumin seeds, nigella seeds, crushed coriander seeds, and fennel seeds. Allow the spices to gently warm in the ghee, once they begin to splutter, add the onions.

Fry the onions on a medium heat until they start to brown and caramelize. Now add the fresh tomatoes and coconut cream, continue to cook till all the tomatoes have broken down. Now add the garlic, ginger and fresh green chillies. Continue to fry, until the whole mixture turns into a golden paste.

Add the paste mixture into the lentils along with the kasuri methi and tamarind. Continue to cook for a further 15 minutes. Stir in the zest and juice of the lemon and the chopped coriander.

For some extra taste and drama

Add ghee to a pan and warm through. Add all the tempering spices allow to fry and sizzle in the pan, pour the whole mixture over the lentils just before you serve with warm rotis.

