

## **Dave's Tarka Dhal**

Before you spend time preparing and cooking the core ingredients, you should have the opportunity to get straight into a simple dish that is nonetheless one of those iconic dishes we all immediately associate with British Indian restaurant cuisine. Despite the fact that it generally doesn't contain gravy, it is nonetheless considered to have that legendary BIR flavour and it's certainly not the only dish on your Indian restaurant menu to do without gravy.

So what's this dish that lets us immediately proceed with the BIR adventure?

It's the one and only tarka dhal. Grab last night's leftover chapatti from the fridge and let's substantiate the claims made on the cover of this book. With that done you can proceed with confidence.

### ***What is tarka?***

Simply this. Once you have cooked your main meal, take another frying pan, put in a bit of oil or ghee and fry some garlic and/or some dried whole spices, allowing their flavour to infuse into the oil. Then just pour the content of the whole pan over your main curry dish. That's it.

This method is used extensively in BIR kitchens and it's a very neat way to add your favourite flavours to your curry. Experiment widely with the tarka, using any spices that take your fancy. Who knows what flavours

and aromas you may discover? And you won't be just blindly following a recipe, you'll be putting a stamp of individuality on your curries; you'll be involved in the process of creation. By making a different tarka each time, you will soon find the one that is exactly right for you, and that one is yours.

Just remember that there are few steadfast rules, and don't measure anything. (Exercise some caution, though. In BIR cookery, less is more – it's often just a pinch of this and a pinch of that. The worst thing you can do is use too much of an ingredient.) But apart from that, it's really all about you. You know the tastes and aromas you like, so use this book to help you discover the combinations and techniques that produce them. With BIR cooking it's often not *what* you cook or what ingredients you use but *how* you cook them that makes the difference.

This recipe for tarka dhal is a prime example of that. There are just a few ingredients, but by using the right cooking methods the result you get is almost miraculous. You can cook a masterpiece in your own kitchen. Who says that BIR curry can't be replicated at home? It can, and you're about to prove it.

### ***Tarka dhal***

You need:

1 small packet of **yellow lentils**, soaked for a few hours or overnight.

Salt to taste.

1 bunch of **coriander**, including stalks, chopped finely. (This recipe is a good way to use up any spare stalks.)

Vegetable oil.

1 bulb or **garlic**, cloves separated, peeled, and each sliced into 5 or 6 pieces. (Later, after we've been through the gravy process and you have some on hand you could add a little, but it's not really necessary. It's just as nice without.

---

After rinsing them thoroughly, place the **lentils** into a saucepan and add just enough water to cover them. This is important as you don't want the lentils to end up all watery; you can always add more water later if you need to. Cooking them this way allows the lentils to keep more of their integrity, which add to the quality of the dish. Now add a generous measure of **salt**. I've never measured it but I'd guess at least a teaspoon. The salt is essential to the flavour of this recipe, and it helps to soften the lentils. Once the lentils are soft, whisk them with a fork, breaking some of them down but leaving most of them whole. Then leave them to cool down and to form a thick paste.

OK, that's all the prep done. Now, take your heavy-based frying pan and add as much of the cooled lentil paste as needed . (For example, 3-4 tablespoons would be enough for two people.) Add **water** until you've reached your desired consistency. Some like it thick, others a bit thinner – it's up to you. Now onto the stove with it and heat it through. When you've got a nice boil going, turn the heat down to a simmer and throw in a generous handful of the **coriander**. Give it a good stir and then place it in a serving dish.

Right, that's the dhal done. Now for the tarka.

Take a small frying pan, add a tablespoon or so of oil and a really good handful of the **garlic**. Don't have the heat too high as the garlic will brown too quickly, but do cook it until it is brown around the outside. You may find that some of it looks slightly burned, but don't worry about that; this is the right way to cook garlic. Once it's sticky, pour the contents of the whole pan over the lentils, stir, and your tarka is ready to serve. It's that simple. Simplicity is, in fact, a BIR cooking characteristic (although there are many years experimentation encapsulated within that simplicity).