

Spinach Sambar

By Chitra Agrawal

Sambar, a spicy lentil and vegetable stew, is a staple in most South Indian homes. The recipe I make is one that I learned from my mother, who's from Bangalore. Each household in South India has their own recipe for the fragrant spice mixture that flavors the sambar so the stew will taste slightly different from home to home. Note: Sambar powder is made from coriander seeds, chana dal, cumin seeds, mustard seeds, fenugreek seeds, urad dal, peppercorns, asafoetida, turmeric, cloves, cinnamon, and chili powder.

Serves 4

- 2 cups spinach, chopped
- 1 cup masoor or red lentils
- 2 tablespoons sambar powder (MTR brand is good)
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1 teaspoon tamarind paste (Tamcon or Swad brand is good)
- Salt
- 3 tablespoons ghee or vegetable, canola, safflower oil
- 1 pinch asafetida or hing
- 1/2 teaspoon black mustard seeds
- 4 fresh curry leaves
- 1 dried red Indian chili pepper, broken in half
- 1/2 red onion, chopped
- Chopped cilantro

1. Wash masoor dal until water is clear, drain and set aside.
2. Add drained lentils and 7 cups of water to pot. Bring to a boil under medium-high heat and then simmer.
3. While dal is cooking, ladle out any foam that comes to the surface. Once foam stops, mix in turmeric powder.
4. Continue to cook dal for 30 to 40 minutes, the lentils should be fallen apart.
5. At this point, mix in your chopped spinach and cook for 3 to 4 minutes or until wilted.
6. Add sambar powder and mix well. Simmer for 5 minutes. You should get a golden-like residue forming on the surface.
7. Add salt to your taste and tamarind concentrate. Make sure the tamarind is completely dissolved. You can also at this time, add more water depending on your preference of thickness. Cook for a few more minutes. Turn off heat.
8. In a separate small pan under medium, heat 2 tablespoons of ghee or oil and put in asafetida (hing) and black mustard seeds. Wait for the seeds to pop a bit. To help this happen, you can put a lid over the pan.
9. Once the black mustard seeds have popped for a few seconds, turn the heat down a little and put the curry leaves and broken up dried red chili. Coat the leaves and chili with the oil and fry for a few seconds.
10. Add in the chopped onions and fry for 10 minutes on low heat. The onions should be translucent and give

off a nice fragrance. Pour this mixture over the lentils and spinach and mix well.

11. Garnish with chopped cilantro leaves. You can serve over rice, with yogurt and achaar (Indian pickle) on the side.