

Dal

Dal



Lentils are a staple ingredient in Indian cuisine. Here clockwise from the upper right are: split red lentils, common green whole lentils, and Le Puy lentils both with their outer coats visible

Details

Main ingredient(s)

Lentils, peas or beans

Dal (also spelled **Dahl** or **Daal**) is a preparation of pulses (dried lentils, peas or beans) which have been stripped of their outer hulls and split. It also refers to the thick stew prepared from these pulses, an important part of Indian, Nepali, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, West Indian and Bangladeshi cuisine. It is regularly eaten with rice and vegetables in southern India, and with both rice and *roti* (wheat-based flat bread) throughout northern India and Pakistan. Dal is a ready source of proteins for a balanced diet containing little or no meat. Sri Lankan cooking of dal resembles that of southern Indian dishes. This is called *paruppu* in Tamil.



Dal makhani, a popular dish.

Etymology

The word *dāl* derives from the Sanskrit verbal root *dal-* 'to split'.^[1]

Usage in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka

Dal preparations can be eaten with rice, as well as Indian breads in North India. In Pakistan it is eaten with rice and with wheat bread called *Roti*. The way Dal is cooked and presented in Pakistan is less oily than other parts of the region. Dal has an exceptional nutritional profile. It provides an excellent source of protein for the Indian subcontinent, particularly for those adopting vegetarian diets or diets which do not contain much meat. Dal is typically around 25% protein by weight, giving it a comparable protein content to meats. Dal is also high in carbohydrates whilst being virtually fat-free. Dal is also rich in the B vitamins thiamine and folic acid as well as several minerals, notably iron and zinc.



Split *toor dal*, a common variety of dal

Common varieties

- *Toor dal*, i.e. yellow pigeon peas, is available either plain or oily. It is the main ingredient for the South Indian recipe called *sambar*. In Karnataka it is called *Togari bele*.
- *Chana dal* is produced by removing the outer layer of *kala chana* (black chickpeas) and then splitting the kernel. Although machines can do this, it can also be done at home by soaking the whole chickpeas and removing the loose skins by rubbing.
- Yellow split peas, while not commonly used on the Indian sub-continent, are very prevalent in the Indian communities of Guyana and Trinidad, and were formerly popular amongst Indians in the United States. There, it is referred to generically as dal and is the most popular dal, although *masoor dal* and *toor dal* are also used. It is prepared similarly to dals found in India, but also may be used in a variety of other recipes.
- *Kala chana* are small chickpeas with brown skins. In the US and Canada, it is known as Desi chickpea and the variety most used is called 'Myles'. It is very disease resistant.
- *Kabuli dal*, known for its black coat, is an average-sized chickpea. It grows naturally with the black coat, and it is said to be nuttier in flavor.
- *Mung dal* is known as mung bean.
- *Lobiya dal* - black-eyed bean
- *Urad dal*, sometimes referred to as "black gram", is the main ingredient of the South Indian dishes: *idli* and *dosa*. It is also one of the main ingredients of East Indian (*oriya* and Bengali or Assamese) *pitha*. The Punjabi version is *dal makhani*. In Karnataka it is called *Uddina bele*.
- *Masoor dal* is red lentils. In Karnataka it is called *Kempu (red) Togari bele*.
- *Rajma dal* - kidney beans
- *Mussyang* is from dals of various colors found in various hilly regions of Nepal.



Dal tadka

Split and whole pulses

Although dal generally refers to split pulses, whole pulses are known as *sabūt dal* and split pulses as *dhuli dal*.^[2] The hulling of a pulse is intended to improve digestibility and palatability, but as with milling of whole grains into refined grains, affects the nutrition provided by the dish, reducing dietary fiber content.^[3] Pulses with their outer hull intact are also quite popular in India and Pakistan as the main cuisine. Over 50 different varieties of pulses are known in India and Pakistan.

Preparing dal

Most dal recipes are quite simple to prepare. The standard preparation of dal begins with boiling a variety of dal (or a mix) in water with some turmeric, salt to taste, and then adding a fried garnish at the end of the cooking process. In some recipes, tomatoes, tamarind, unripe mango, or other ingredients are added while cooking the dal, often to impart a sour flavor.

The fried garnish for dal goes by many names, including *chaunk* and *tadka*. The ingredients in the *chaunk* for each variety of dal vary by region and individual tastes. The raw spices (more commonly cumin seeds, mustard seeds and/or asafoetida; sometimes fenugreek seeds and dried red chili pepper) are first fried for a few seconds in the hot oil on medium/low heat. This is generally followed by ginger, garlic and onion, which is generally fried for 10 minutes. After the onion turns golden brown, ground spices (turmeric, coriander, red chili powder, *garam masala*, etc.) are added. The *chaunk* is then poured over the cooked dal.



Masoor dal being prepared

References

- [1] Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary (<http://webapps.uni-koeln.de/tamil/>) accessed online 2007-09-02
- [2] Mehta N. (2006), p 12
- [3] doi:10.1016/j.lwt.2008.10.007

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