

Rasam (South Indian Split Pea Soup)

6 cloves garlic

½ tsp. cumin powder

1 tsp. black peppercorns

1–6 fresh green chiles (serranos are good), thickly sliced

1 Tbsp. mustard oil or canola oil

2 tsp. black mustard seed

1 tsp. cumin seed

3 cups water

1 tsp. turmeric

½ cup toor dal or yellow split peas

1 15-oz. can diced tomatoes with juice, pulsed briefly in a blender to mince

½ tsp. salt

2 tsp. tamarind concentrate OR juice of one lemon

chopped cilantro (coriander leaves) for garnish

Crush the garlic, cumin and peppercorns with a mortar and pestle or in a blender, using just enough water to cover the blades.

Slice the chiles, retaining the seeds. The dish is supposed to be hot! This is the South Indian version of chicken soup for colds, so the hotter the better. Trust me.

Heat the oil in a very heavy small pan. Add the mustard seeds, coating the bottom of the pan evenly. Cover the pan quickly and listen for the moment when the furious sound of popping slows dramatically. Then add the cumin seeds so that they brown, but almost immediately remove from the burner and add the chiles, garlic mixture and turmeric, stirring briefly, then add the water.

Bring to a boil and add the toor dal or split peas. Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, until the peas are very well-cooked (approximately 45 minutes). Add the tomatoes, salt and tamarind or lemon. Simmer for another 10 minutes or so.

If you want a uniformly creamy soup, give the finished version a spin in the blender. Serve with a garnish of chopped coriander leaves on top, if you have them.

2 servings

Per serving: 212 calories; 9.39g protein; 7.4g fat; 29.5g carbohydrate; 0mg cholesterol

Source: adapted from *The New Laurel's Kitchen* by Laurel Robertson, Carol Flinders and Brian Ruppenthal (Ten Speed Press, 1986), ISBN 0-89815-166-X

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