

south indian sambar

serves 4

Sambar, a tomato, dal, and tamarind soup served with rice, is a staple of south Indian cuisine, eaten for breakfast as well as lunch. On my first trip to south India, spicy sambar for breakfast took some getting used to. It was everywhere, all the time, and I could never be quite sure what those floating vegetables were. Years later, I don't feel I have arrived in the south until I've had a cup of authentic sambar, and I make it often at home in winter and spring. To keep it very simple for you, I have veered from tradition a bit here by using premade sambar powder that you can buy from an Indian grocer and only ingredients you can find easily. This is a great spring recipe because of its hot, light, pungent, and sour qualities. If your stomach gets aggravated by spicy or sour food, reduce the sambar powder to make it less spicy and reduce the tomato to make it less sour.

LUNCH

- 4 cups water
- ½ cup yellow split mung beans, rinsed twice
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 2 small tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- ½ cup coarsely chopped carrot
- ½ cup coarsely chopped green bean
- ½ cup coarsely chopped daikon radish
- 1 tbsp coconut oil
- 1 small onion, diced (optional)
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 2 sprigs fresh curry leaf (optional)
- 2 pinches hing (asafetida)
- ¼ cup grated coconut (see sidebar)
- 1–2 tsp sambar powder
- salt to taste
- fresh cilantro for garnish (optional)

Bring the water to a boil in a large saucepan. Add the mung beans and turmeric powder and bring to a boil again. Add the chopped vegetables to the pot, except onion, if using. Turn heat down to low and simmer, partially covered for 30 minutes.

While the dal is cooking, heat the coconut oil in a frying pan and fry the diced onion on medium heat until translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir in the mustard seeds; these will splutter, so cover before frying for 1 minute. Add curry leaf and stir, then add hing and stir until all the spices are coated with the oil. When you can smell the spices, turn off the heat. Stir the grated coconut into the hot oil mixture and let stand for 1–2 minutes.

Add the spiced oil and sambar powder to the cooked dal in the saucepan. Simmer all together for 5 minutes, adding hot water if the sambar is getting too thick—it should be a bit watery. Add salt to taste.

Serve in 4 bowls with Everyday Dosa or pour over basmati rice. Garnish with fresh cilantro, if you like. Adventure-chef note: for a more authentic and sour flavor, you may also stir in 2–3 tsp of tamarind paste when you add the tomato.

