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How To Cook Vegetarian Indian Sambar At Home?

Cooking sambar at home is a delightful process that brings together the rich flavors of lentils, vegetables, and spices. Here's a step-by-step guide to making traditional South Indian sambar:

Ingredients:

For the Sambar:

- **Toor dal** (pigeon peas): 1/2 cup
- **Turmeric powder**: 1/4 teaspoon
- **Tamarind**: 1 small lemon-sized ball (soaked in warm water)
- **Mixed vegetables** (drumsticks, carrots, potatoes, pumpkin, okra, tomatoes, eggplant, etc.): 1-2 cups, chopped
- **Sambar powder**: 2 tablespoons
- **Salt**: to taste

- **Water:** as needed
- **Jaggery** (optional): 1 teaspoon

For the Tempering (Tadka):

- **Oil or ghee:** 2 tablespoons
- **Mustard seeds:** 1 teaspoon
- **Cumin seeds:** 1/2 teaspoon
- **Dried red chillies:** 2, broken
- **Curry leaves:** 8-10 leaves
- **Asafoetida (hing):** a pinch

Instructions:

1. Cook the Lentils:

1. Wash the toor dal thoroughly under running water.
2. In a pressure cooker, add the washed dal, turmeric powder, and about 2 cups of water.
3. Cook the dal on medium heat for 4-5 whistles or until it becomes soft and mushy. If you're using a pot, cook until the dal is very soft, which may take about 30-40 minutes.
4. Once cooked, mash the dal well with the back of a spoon and set it aside.

2. Prepare Tamarind Extract:

1. While the dal is cooking, soak the tamarind in warm water for about 10-15 minutes.
2. Squeeze the tamarind well to extract the juice and strain out the pulp. Set the tamarind juice aside.

3. Cook the Vegetables:

1. In a large pot, add the chopped vegetables, tamarind juice, and a pinch of turmeric powder.
2. Add enough water to cover the vegetables and bring it to a boil.
3. Reduce the heat and let the vegetables cook until they are tender but not mushy. This should take about 10-15 minutes.

4. Combine the Dal and Vegetables:

1. Once the vegetables are cooked, add the mashed dal to the pot.
2. Add sambar powder and salt to taste. Mix everything well.
3. Let the sambar simmer on low heat for about 10 minutes, allowing the flavors to meld together. If the sambar is too thick, add a little water to achieve the desired consistency.
4. Optionally, add jaggery for a hint of sweetness and balance of flavors. Simmer for another 2-3 minutes.

5. Prepare the Tempering (Tadka):

1. In a small pan, heat oil or ghee over medium heat.
2. Add mustard seeds and let them splutter.
3. Add cumin seeds, dried red chilies, and curry leaves. Fry them for a few seconds until aromatic.
4. Add a pinch of asafoetida (hing) and stir well.
5. Pour this tempering over the simmering sambar and mix it well.

6. Final Touches:

1. Let the sambar simmer for another 2 minutes to allow the tempering flavors to blend.
2. Turn off the heat and cover the pot. Let the sambar sit for a few minutes before serving.

Serving Suggestions:

- Serve hot sambar with steamed rice, idli, dosa, or vada.

- Accompany it with a dollop of ghee for extra richness and flavor.
- You can garnish the sambar with fresh coriander leaves for added freshness.

Tips:

- **Sambar Powder:** If you don't have store-bought sambar powder, you can make a quick version at home by roasting and grinding coriander seeds, dried red chilies, cumin seeds, fenugreek seeds, and a little turmeric.
- **Consistency:** Adjust the consistency of sambar to your liking by adding more or less water. It should be slightly thick but pourable.
- **Vegetables:** You can use any combination of vegetables you prefer or have on hand. Each adds a unique flavor and texture to the sambar.

Enjoy your homemade sambar with your favorite South Indian dishes!