



Curried Lentils with Poached Eggs

Notes: Serves at least 4

Ingredients

- 15 whole black peppercorns (we used Tellicherry)
- 12 whole cloves
- 4 green cardamom pods
- 1 or 2 star anise pods
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 medium carrots, chopped fine (about 1 cup)
- 1 medium onion, chopped fine (about 1 cup)
- 1 small parsnip chopped fine (about 1/3 cup)
- 3 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 teaspoons garam masala (you can also use plain old generic “curry powder”—if you do, omit the turmeric below)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/8 teaspoon turmeric
- 1/8 teaspoon allspice
- 1/4 teaspoon Aleppo pepper (or 1/8 teaspoon cayenne)
- 3/4 pound lentils
- 3 tablespoons white rice (optional—see Kitchen Notes)
- 5 cups water
- 2 teaspoons sliced green part of scallion for garnish (optional)
- 4 eggs, for poaching
- distilled white vinegar
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

Instructions:

Put a small piece of cheesecloth or muslin on the counter (about a foot square) and place on it the cloves, cardamom pods, peppercorns, and bay leaf. Tie all into a little packet and reserve it. If you use muslin, you can also quickly stitch it up on the sewing machine, which is what I did.

Heat the olive oil in a heavy-bottomed pot over a medium flame. Sauté the garlic until it starts turning golden. Add the onion, carrots and parsnip, stir, and sauté three or four minutes until the onion is clear and soft. Add the tomato paste, cinnamon, garam masala, ground coriander, turmeric and allspice, stir well, and sauté for another 2 or 3 minutes. The tomato paste will start to caramelize. You want that. Add the spice package, stir everything together and sauté another minute.

Add the lentils and rice (if using) and the water, and stir everything together. Bring it all to a boil, turn down the heat to very low, and cook until the lentils become just tender. This should take about 20 – 25 minutes. Keep an eye on things so they do not become too dry and so the lentils don't stick to the bottom of the pot. Also, don't let the lentils get mushy-soft. When the lentils are cooked, throw away the spice packet. Adjust with salt and pepper at this point. The lentils are ready to serve now (you can also make the lentils a day ahead and store in an airtight container in the fridge).

Poach the eggs. Do this at the very last, so the eggs are still warm when served. Use very fresh eggs—these poach best. Break eggs into individual ramekins or small bowls. Heat about 1 inch of water in a medium nonstick skillet over medium flame. Do NOT bring the water to a boil. You don't even want it to truly simmer, but make sure you give it time to get hot. When bubbles begin to coat the bottom of the pan, reduce heat to low.

Add a splash of vinegar to the pan to help hold the eggs together. Using a spoon, stir the water in the pan around the edges to create a gentle whirlpool in the center. Holding the ramekin close to the surface of the water, pour an egg into the center of the whirlpool. Let the egg cook undisturbed for about 30 seconds. If you get any flyaway tendrils of egg

Instructions cont.

white, gently push them back toward the egg with a spoon. Cook the egg until just set, 3 to 4 minutes (4 worked best for us). Using a slotted spoon, transfer the egg to a folded paper towel on a plate. (If the egg is sticking to the pan, gently free it with a spatula.)

Cook the remaining eggs, transferring each to its own folded paper towel. (If you feel that some of your eggs have cooled too much while waiting for all to be cooked, return them briefly to the pan of hot water—the heat should be turned off by now—to rewarm them.)

To plate, warm the lentils and spoon them into shallow bowls or soup plates. Carefully lift each egg in turn from its paper towel and place it atop a serving of lentils. This is a total hands-on step. Season the egg with a little salt and pepper. Garnish each plate with the sliced scallion and serve immediately.

Kitchen Notes

How many servings? This recipe will give you enough lentils to serve up to six people. Just poach more eggs, as needed.

Adding rice—or not. If you have rice on hand, adding it to the lentils will create a complete protein.