



Monsoon Black-Eyed Pea Curry

Black eyed peas cooked with tomatoes and coconut milk

Yields about 4 cups, 4 to 6 servings

Active: 45 minutes

Total time: 45 minutes

The summer monsoon season in India is a time of both romance and trial. We were in Goa during the monsoons a couple of years ago, and I found myself intoxicated by the way the coconut groves and rice paddies turned almost neon green against the grey skies. The rains were mercurial; one minute we strolled under blue skies and hot sun, the next minute we were running for cover under corrugated roofs by the side of the road. During the monsoons, fish, normally a staple in coastal towns like Goa and my own, Mangalore, is hard to come by. That's where lentils come into play, although I must say, these black eyed peas are so good, you don't need to wait for your own version of the Monsoons to make them! These go great with white basmati rice or hunks of crusty bread, and a simple green salad.

Ingredients

2 tablespoons sunflower oil
1/2 medium yellow onion, peeled and finely diced (about 1 cup)
1 sprig curry leaves, about 16
2 tablespoons minced garlic (about 5 cloves)
1 teaspoon peeled and grated ginger, a scant 1/2 inch
1/2 cup canned diced fire-roasted tomatoes
2 teaspoons ground coriander
1 teaspoon ground cumin
3/4 teaspoon paprika
1/2 teaspoon turmeric
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper (leave this out if you don't like things spicy)
2 15.5-ounce cans black eyed peas, drained and rinsed
1 cup hot water
3/4 teaspoon dark brown sugar
3/4 cup canned coconut milk
1/2 teaspoon tamarind concentrate or 2 teaspoons lime juice
Small handful finely chopped cilantro leaves and soft stems (about 1/4 cup)

Directions

Combine oil, onions and a pinch of salt in a large preferably nonstick wok or pot. Set it over medium heat until you hear the onions sizzling. Give them a stir, and cook until deep golden brown and sweet-smelling, 10 to 12 minutes. Make sure you stir them near constantly in the last few minutes to keep them from burning, and add a splash of water (carefully!) if they start to stick.

Add curry leaves, garlic and ginger, and cook for 30 seconds, until fragrant.

Now to add the spice mix. If you're using a nonstick pan, sprinkle away. If not, then dissolve the spices in a little water, then add to the pot. Either way, stir constantly for 30 seconds.

Carefully add the tomatoes (they will splutter), and stir well. Cook for a couple of minutes, smashing the tomatoes with your spoon, until thickened and nearly dry.

Add the black-eyed peas, hot water, sugar and 3/4 teaspoon salt. Stir until well combined, and bring to a boil over high heat. Turn down to a simmer, cover and cook for 10 minutes.

Stir in tamarind concentrate and my favorite part, that luxurious, creamy coconut milk. Simmer very gently, uncovered, for 8 to 10 minutes, just to thicken it up a bit. Taste for seasoning, and finish with cilantro.