

Spicy green beans

Masaledar sem

[From Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cooking]

These green beans may, of course, be served with an Indian dinner. But they could perk up a simple meal of roast chicken, pork chops or meat loaf as well. They are tart and hot and would complement the plainest of everyday foods with their zesty blend of flavours. Another good thing about them they may be made ahead of time and reheated.

Serves 6:

- 1-1/2 lb. (700g) fresh green beans
- A piece of fresh ginger, about 1-1/2 inches (4cm) long and 1 inch (2.5cm) thick, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 10 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1-1/2 cups (350ml) water
- 5 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons whole cumin seeds
- 1 whole, dried hot red chili, lightly crushed in a mortar
- 2 teaspoons ground coriander seeds
- 2 medium tomatoes, peeled (see below) and finely chopped
- About 1-1/4 teaspoons salt
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice - or to taste
- 1 teaspoon ground, roasted cumin seeds (see below)
- Freshly ground black pepper

Trim the green beans and cut them crosswise at 1/4 inch (5mm) intervals. Put the ginger and garlic into the container of an electric blender or food processor. Add 1/2 cup (125ml) of the measured water and blend until fairly smooth.

Heat the oil in a wide, heavy saucepan over a medium flame. When hot, put in the cumin seeds. Five seconds later, put in the crushed chili. As soon as it darkens, pour in the ginger-garlic paste. Stir and cook for about a minute. Put in the coriander. Stir a few times. Now put in the chopped tomatoes. Stir and cook for about 2 minutes, mashing up the tomato pieces with the back of a slotted spoon as you do so. Put in the beans, salt, and the remaining 1 cup (225ml) water. Bring to simmer. Cover, turn heat to low and cook for about 8-10 minutes or until the beans are tender. Remove the cover. Add the lemon juice, roasted cumin, and a generous amount of freshly ground pepper. Turn heat up and boil away all of the liquid, stirring the beans gently as you do so.

Peeling and Chopping Tomatoes

Many of my recipes call for peeled and chopped tomatoes. To peel them, bring a pot of water to a rolling boil. Drop in the tomatoes for 15 seconds. Drain, rinse under cold water and peel. Now chop the tomatoes, making sure that you save all the juice that comes out of them. In India, we very rarely seed tomatoes. Many people do not even bother to peel them though I do feel that this improves the texture of a sauce.

Roasted Cumin Seeds

Put 4-5 tablespoons of whole cumin seeds into a small, heavy frying pan (cast-iron frying pans are best for this) and place the pan over a medium flame. No fat is necessary. Stir the seeds and keep roasting them until they turn a few shades darker. Soon you will be able to recognize the wonderful 'roasted' aroma that these seeds emit when they are ready. Store in an airtight container.