**Alom’s Favourite Recipes**

Hello!

Below are some of my favourite recipes – collected over the years from friends and family and the occasional cook book. I’m not a professional recipe writer but I hope the instructions are sufficiently clear for you to make the dishes and see why I love them. If you get stuck for any reason, just drop me an email and I’ll try to help.

**Please don't feel obliged**, but if you’d like to do something nice in return you could buy a copy of my new book [“Why Don’t Things Fall Up?”](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Why-Dont-Things-Fall-Up/dp/1529348161/ref=tmm_hrd_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1690279328&sr=8-1&_encoding=UTF8&tag=alomshaha-21&linkCode=ur2&linkId=352805847b9b6da39cf6e0311a3e2a7a&camp=1634&creative=6738%22%3EWhy%20Don%27t%20Things%20Fall%20Up?%3C/a%3E) or leave a review on Amazon (or any other book website) or just tell people about it!

Happy cooking!

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**Cheap, Easy, Quick Dal**

This is my favourite dal recipe, the one that is closest to the dal I remember my mother cooking (sadly, I never got to learn her recipe), and one I can (and do) eat pretty much every day. You can see a version of this recipe with images at <https://alomshaha.com/cheap-easy-quick-dal/>

**Ingredients:**

300g split red lentils

900 ml water

1 medium / large white onion diced

6 – 8 large cloves garlic, finely chopped (or as much or little as you want)

1 teaspoon ground turmeric

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 dried birds eye chillies (optional – use none or more if you like)

Handful of chopped fresh coriander

Salt.

**Method:**

1. Put the lentils in the pot you’re going to cook them in and rinse until the water runs clear (or as clear as you can be bothered to make it).
2. Add 900 ml of clean cold water to the lentils.
3. Add the chopped onion.
4. Bring to the boil on a high heat.
5. Skim off the white scum that will form on the surface of the water.
6. Reduce heat to a simmer.
7. Add a level teaspoon of ground turmeric and a good pinch (3 grams or so) of salt. Give it all a good stir.
8. Leave to simmer on a low heat, with lid on pan for about 10 minutes. Check occasionally to make sure that there is always a thin layer of water above lentils – if not, add fresh water.
9. Once lentils are puffed up, give the cooked lentils a good stir. If you want, use a whisk – this will help mash up some of the lentils and make the dish more creamy. Leave on a low heat for about 5 more minutes. (If you have the time, cook for longer until the liquid surrounding the lentils becomes “creamy”, but keep an eye on them to make sure they don’t dry out).
10. Once lentils are done (they should have no “bite” when you eat them), either leave on a very low heat or take off heat completely. Then, put two tablespoons of vegetable oil (or mustard oil if you have it) in a frying pan and add the garlic. Crumble the dried chillies into the oil with the garlic. Put the frying pan on a low to medium heat so that the garlic fries gently. You must NOT over cook the garlic.
11. When the garlic is a golden brown colour, pour the oil and garlic directly into the lentils and stir well.
12. Add the chopped coriander and stir that in too.
13. Turn off all heat, and leave pot to sit for about ten minutes.
14. Serve with fresh white rice or roti and some mixed Indian pickle if you have it.

TOP TIPS: If you want a tastier, creamier dal, replace 100g of the split red lentils with 100g of chick pea lentils. Cook this until the chick pea lentils are falling apart, before adding the garlic oil. This will take much longer to cook, but produce a much creamier, tastier dal. To make this a bit more decadent (and more delicious), fry the garlic in ghee or butter.

This recipe is for a really basic dal, you can add all sorts of other spices when frying the garlic – throw in some mustard and nigella seeds (or even all the seeds from a [panch phoron](http://www.withaspin.com/2014/04/27/panch-phoron-a-must-spice-blend-in-bengali-cooking/)), ground coriander, ground cumin, some chopped tomatoes, or whatever takes your fancy. Experiment, and make your own favourite dal.

**Spicy Tomato Dal**

This is my wife’s favourite dal and demonstrates just how much flavour you can impart to this humble dish if you select the right combination of spices.

**Ingredients:**

300g mung lentils or split red lentils (washed and drained)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1250 ml (1.25 litres) water

3- 4 medium tomatoes OR 250 g of cherry tomatoes chopped, OR half a can of chopped tinned tomatoes

2 inches of grated / minced ginger

Same quantity of minced garlic as ginger

½ teaspoon ground turmeric

Handful of chopped fresh coriander

1 teaspoon chilli flakes / couple of crushed dried chillies (optional)

Big pinch of curry leaves (10 - 15 leaves)

1 teaspoon of salt (or to your own tastes)

For the tarka:

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

Another big pinch of curry leaves (10 - 15 leaves)

1 chopped green finger chilli (optional)

**Method:**

1. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a saucepan big enough to hold the lentils and water.
2. Add the ginger and garlic and fry for a couple of minutes until the garlic is golden brown
3. Add the chopped tomatoes and cook for ten minutes or so on a low / medium heat, stirring occasionally, until completely soft and the oil is floating on top.
4. Add the turmeric, curry leaves, chilli flakes / dried chilli, stir well and cook for a further two minutes.
5. Add the lentils and water mix well.
6. Bring to the boil and skim off any scum.
7. Simmer on a low heat with lid on but with just a little opening to let steam out for 30 to 40 minutes until lentils are completely soft, with no bite.
8. Stir in the salt.
9. Once dal is soft, make the tarka: in a separate frying pan, heat two tablespoons of vegetable oil in a frying pan til hot (not smoking) and add cumin seeds and mustard seeds and chopped green chilli if using. Stir / move frying pan around to ensure cumin seeds and curry leaves are browned all over. Do this for one or two minutes, so that the ingredients sizzle and turn brown but make sure they don’t turn black or burn.
10. Pour the hot oil, cumin seeds etc. into the lentils. Give a good stir.
11. Add some chopped fresh coriander.

Serve with fresh white rice / roti.

**(Vegan) Black Dal Makhani**

My [favourite dal](https://alomshaha.com/cheap-easy-quick-dal/) is the Sylheti-Bangladeshi one I grew up with at the start of this booklet, and one which is usually sold in Indian restaurants as “tarka dal”. I’d never tried “dal makhani” (a traditional [Punjabi dish](https://www.differenttruths.com/travel-getaways/history-culture/food-history-culture/the-story-of-dal-makhani/)) until I was an adult when, sometime in the last decade or so, I tasted and fell in love with the famous “[black dal](https://www.theguardian.com/food/2019/sep/07/four-classic-indian-recipes-dishoom-chaat-dal-salad-jackfruit-biyani-chicken-makhani-curry)” at Dishoom. The recipe for this was not available for many years but I stumbled across [this one at “The Tiffin Box”](http://www.thetiffinbox.ca/2012/02/dal-bukhara.html) which sounded like it would be good. Below is my slightly modified version of it which is suitable for vegans. The main difference is that I don’t use any butter (“makhani” means butter, so this may actually be sacrilegious) and make it entirely on the stove top, without using the oven. I also use a pressure cooker to speed up the process (and save fuel) but you don’t need to do this.

**Ingredients**:

250g black (urad) lentils, washed and rinsed and soaked overnight (this is essential)   
2 large pieces of cinnamon stick or cassia bark  
2 large bay leaves

3 tablespoons of vegetable oil (or 1 tbsp of butter + 2 of oil if not vegan)  
1 large onion, diced fine  
6 cloves of garlic, crushed  
2 inch piece of thick ginger, grated  
1 teaspoon garam masala  
1/2 can of tinned tomatoes  
Hot water  
Salt to taste  
2 teaspoons of sugar  
Non-vegan option: 50 – 100 ml cream

**Spice Mix:**  
1 tablespoon whole coriander seeds  
½ tablespoon whole cumin seeds  
1 teaspoon fennel seeds  
1 teaspoon chilli powder  
2 inches cassia bark or cinnamon  
8 whole cloves  
4 green cardamoms, left whole  
3/4 of a star anise  
2 dried bay leaves

**Method:**

Boil the lentils vigorously in plenty of water with 2 sticks of cinnamon and 2 bay leaves for 15 minute.

Skim off any scum that rises to the top.

Cook in pressure cooker under pressure for 20 minutes OR reduce heat and simmer for about 60-90 minutes. The lentils are cooked when they are soft, but just about holding their shape.

Drain lentils and discard the cinnamon sticks and bay leaves. Keep aside

Make spice mix: toss the ingredients in a hot pan, shaking and stirring constantly for about 30 – 45 seconds, until fragrant. Grind them to a fine powder in a spice grinder. Keep aside.

In a saucepan that will be big enough to hold the lentils,, heat the oil (or oil and butter) . Add the onion, and cook for 5 – 8 minutes, until the onion is soft and is yellow and starting to go brown in places..  
  
Add the garlic and ginger and fry for a minute or two.  
  
Add the tomatoes, the spice mix and garam masala, and stir well to make a paste. Add a little hot water to loosen this if it is too thick.  
  
Continue cooking this on a low heat for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, then add the drained lentils. Stir the tomato paste and lentils together then add some hot water so lentils are covered by about a centimetre or so of water. Bring to the boil. Add the salt to taste (at least 1 teaspoon in my case), and stir in the sugar.

Simmer on a low heat for at least 30 minutes, topping up water if necessary (I have not tried pressure cooking it again at this stage, let me know if you have). You can serve this if you want, it will taste good, but it will taste MUCH BETTER if you simmer it for longer (up to several hours, topping up the water when necessary), AND leave it overnight, then reheat, adding a bit of water if it’s become too stodgy. If you’re not vegan, the dish would also be improved by the stirring in a good knob of butter or about 50 -100 ml of cream or even BOTH if you’re feeling particularly decadent.

**Sweet Squash (and optional Prawn) Curry**

This is a lovely sweetly savoury dish.

**Ingredients:**

400 - 500 g of butternut squash, peeled and cut into 1 cm cubes

1 large / 2 medium white onions, diced.

4 – 6 large cloves garlic, finely chopped / minced

2 – 3 green finger chillies, chopped (can leave out if you are not keen on chilli heat, but they also add flavour).

1 teaspoon of good mixed curry powder (I use Bolst’s)

Third of a teaspoon of ground turmeric.

300 – 400 g prawns (optional, frozen and defrosted ones will do)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil (or mustard oil if you have it)

Salt to taste (I add a whole teaspoon and a bit)

½ teaspoon sugar

**Method:**

1. Fry onion, garlic and chilli in oil on medium heat, stirring, til soft and brown.
2. Add turmeric and curry powder and cook for a minute or so, making sure it doesn't burn or stick to pan.
3. Add squash and stir to cover in spices. Cook on low heat for 5 minutes.
4. Add salt to taste
5. Add 200 ml of water (just enough to cover squash) and cook on low heat for 15 minutes or until squash is falling apart.
6. Taste – if it’s not sweet enough to your liking, add a small pinch of sugar.
7. If using, add prawns and cook for further 5 minutes.
8. Add fresh coriander

Serve with fresh white rice.

**Squash Dal**

This makes the first dal above into a more substantial dish. It essentially involves making a simple dal and a squash curry and mixing them together.

**Ingredients:**

For the dal:

300g split red lentils

900 ml water

1 medium / large white onion diced

1 teaspoon ground turmeric

For the squash curry

400 - 500 g of butternut squash, peeled and chopped into roughly 1 cm cubes

1 large onion, diced

3 – 4 cardamom pods

5 cloves

1 cinnamon stick or 4 inches of cassia bark

2 dried bay leaves

1 tablespoon minced ginger (out of a jar is fine)

1 tablespoon minced garlic (out of a jar is fine)

1 large tomato / handful of cherry tomatoes diced

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 tablespoons of a good curry powder (I used Bolst’s)

For the tarka:

1-2 tablespoons vegetable oil

3-4 cloves minced / finely chopped garlic

2-3 dried chillies (optional)

Handful of chopped fresh coriander.

Salt to taste

**Method:**

First, cook dal and set aside -

1. Put the lentils in the pot you’re going to cook them in and rinse until the water runs clear (or as clear as you can be bothered to make it).
2. Add 900 ml of clean cold water to the lentils.
3. Add the chopped onion.
4. Bring to the boil on a high heat.
5. Skim off the white scum that will form on the surface of the water.
6. Add a level teaspoon of ground turmeric and a good pinch of salt. Give it all a good stir.
7. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook with lid on but slightly open to let steam out
8. Check occasionally to make sure that there is always a thin layer of water above lentils – if not, add fresh water.
9. Once lentils are puffed up, give the cooked lentils a good stir.

Second: cook squash curry –

1. Heat two tablespoons of vegetable oil in a pot that will be big enough to hold the lentils and squash.
2. Add cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, bay leaves, and heat for a minute (you should smell the spices)
3. Add onions and fry on a medium heat, stirring til onions are soft and brown (about 5 – 10 mins)
4. Add ginger and garlic and fry for further 5 mins, stirring to make sure nothing burns or sticks to pan.
5. Add curry powder and fry for couple of minutes, stirring to make sure it doesn't burn
6. Add tomatoes, stir, and cook on low heat for ten minutes.
7. Add squash and stir, add a splash of water if it’s all sticking to pan.
8. Simmer on low heat for about ten minutes until squash is soft.
9. Add a little salt to taste
10. Stir in the dal you made earlier

Finally: make the tarka by frying the chopped garlic and dried chilli (if using) in two tablespoons of vegetable oil until the garlic is golden brown. Then pour this into the dal and squash mixture. Add the fresh coriander and more salt if necessary.

Serve with fresh white rice.

**Sag Paneer (or Tofu)**

This is my attempt to recreate the most delicious sag paneer I once ate at a restaurant on Drummond Street. It took a few goes, and I have no idea if this is at all like the recipe they use, but it gives me the same sense of happiness eating it. You can leave out the paneer or tofu if you want – the spinach sauce is pretty fantastic on its own.

**Ingredients:**

500 g frozen chopped spinach

225 g or so of paneer cut into 2 cm or so cubes / cuboids OR similar quantity of Tofu which can be fried into crispy cubes. Toss these in a tablespoon of vegetable oil with half a teaspoon of ground turmeric and leave to one side.

1 large white onion, diced.

1 – 2 green finger chillies, chopped

1 tbsp ginger paste (out of a jar is fine)

1 tbsp garlic paste (out of a jar is fine)

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 teaspoon ground coriander

½ teaspoon ground turmeric

½ teaspoon garam masala

Salt to tase

2 tablespoons vegetable oil for sauce

4 tablespoons of vegetable oil for frying the paneer

2 tablespoons double cream (optional)

**Method:**

1. Fry onions and green chilli in vegetable oil on medium heat until soft and brown
2. Add ginger and garlic and fry for further 3 – 5 minutes
3. Add ground spices and fry for 2 more minutes
4. Add frozen spinach and cook on low / medium heat, stirring occasionally until spinach is defrosted.
5. Add salt to tase
6. Use a hand blender if you have one to blitz this mixture into a thick sauce. Add a dollop of cream if you want to.
7. Leave overnight if you can – it will taste much better. You can eat the sauce with rice or roti as it is, or you can add the paneer which needs to be fried as follows just before serving:
8. Heat 4 tablespoons of vegetable oil and shallow fry the paneer until it is crispy on all sides. You may need to do this in batches.
9. Drain the fried paneer on kitchen towel and sprinkle if salt if desired.
10. Put the warm spinach sauce in a dish and poke the cubes of paneer / tofu into it so that they stick out

Serve with fresh white rice / roti

**Various Fried Vegetables with Turmeric, Onions, Chilli and Garlic**

This recipe works with all sorts of vegetable – I usually make it with white cabbage or, if I’m feeling flush, runner beans or okra. Below is a recipe using white cabbage, you can just replace the cabbage with sliced beans or okra.

**Ingredients:**

¼ of a white cabbage, shredded into ½ cm wide, 3-5 cm long bits

1 large white onion, sliced (not diced)

2 – 3 green finger chillies, sliced

4 – 6 garlic cloves, finely chopped / minced

½ teaspoon ground turmeric

2 – 3 tablespoons vegetable oil

Salt to taste

**Method:**

1. Fry the onions, garlic and green chilli in vegetable oil on medium heat until onions just turned translucent, starting to brown
2. Add shredded cabbage and stir well on high heat until cabbage covered in oil.
3. Add turmeric and salt
4. Keep stir frying until cabbage is soft (you can leave with a little bite if you prefer)

To make this more interesting / nutritious, you can add CASHEW NUTS or boiled chickpeas at the frying cabbage stage.

Serve with fresh white rice.

**Simple Aloo**

**Ingredients:**

6 – 8 new potatoes / 2 large potatoes, cut into roughly 2 cm cubes

Same volume of frozen spinach – leaves or chopped

1 medium / large onion, diced

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

½ teaspoon ground turmeric

1 teaspoon ground coriander

4-5 cloves minced garlic

2 inches grated fresh ginger

2 tablespoons of vegetable oil

Salt to taste

**Method:**

1. Heat vegetable oil in pot and add cumin seeds and let them sizzle for about a minute, making sure they turn brown, but don’t burn.
2. Add garlic and fry on medium heat til golden brown
3. Add onion and fry til soft and translucent
4. Add ginger and continue cooking til onion light brown
5. Add potatoes and stir well, leave for a couple of minutes.
6. Add turmeric and ground coriander and stir well, leave for a minute.
7. Add salt and stir well.
8. Add a splash of water, just enough to cover base of pan, and cook on low / medium heat til potatoes done
9. Stir in frozen spinach and cook til it is all defrosted and warmed through.

Serve with fresh white rice

**Aloo Satni (also known as Aloo Bhorta)**

To make enough for two people:

2 large potatoes / large handful of new potatoes (skin on), boiled.

Half a small red or white onion, diced.

Small handful of fresh coriander leaves, torn into small pieces, stems included

Couple of cloves of garlic, minced and

Couple of dried birds eye or Kashmiri chillies (leave out if you can’t tolerate heat)

1 green finger chilli (optional)

Good pinch of salt

IDEALLLY: 1 tablespoon of mustard oil (available in ethnic shops in the UK, usually marked “for external use” – this is because it contains high levels of a chemical, erucic acid, which is not approved for consumption in UK but is elsewhere in the world)

METHOD:

1. Fry the garlic and dried chilli in a couple of tables spoons of vegetable oil until the garlic is just beyond golden brown. Strain and save the oil.
2. Put all ingredients in a bowl and add the fried garlic and chilli. If using mustard oil, add this OR 1 tablespoon of the oil in which the garlic was fried, and use your fingers to mash everything together.
3. Serve with fresh white rice or just eat as a snack, maybe in a sandwich.

**Sylheti Kissoori / Khichuri (Rice & Lentil Porridge)**

“Kissoori” as people from my part of Bangladesh (Sylhet) call it, is a comfort food that I love, particularly when feeling poorly, and which proved to be an excellent first solid food for my children. Here’s how I make enough for 4 people:

**Ingredients:**

**200 ml long grain or basmati rice**

**200 ml of split red lentils**

**2 -3 inches of fresh ginger), peeled and grated**

**2 dried Indian bay leaves**

**1 medium / large onion finely diced**

**1/2 teaspoon of turmeric**

**salt to taste (I use about a teaspoon and a quarter)**

**1200 ml of water.**

**OPTIONAL: lump of butter**

**Method:**

**Step 1: Mix the lentils and rice in the pot you’re going to cook them in, then rinse under cold water until water runs clear(ish)**

**Step 2: Drain all water from pot, then add 1200 ml of clean water. Chuck in ginger, bay leaves, onion, turmeric, and salt and give a good stir.**

**Step 3: Bring this to a boil until a scum forms on top**

**Step 4: Use a spoon to skim this scum off (chuck the scum away).**

**Step 5: Turn down heat and simmer with lid on for a about 5 – 10 minutes until rice and lentils are cooked**

**Step 6: Bring back up vigorous boil to get rid of excess water. Chuck in some butter if you want to make it a bit more luxurious**

**Step 7: Leave it to sit on the stove for a while with the heat off – the rice and lentils will continue to absorb water. If in a rush, boil off a bit more of the water until you have something which has the consistency of porridge (you can decide for yourself how you like it). Serve on its own or, as I like it, with a good drizzle of Encona Hot Pepper Sauce (and more butter). This freezes pretty well – add a dash more water and butter when you reheat to make it as good as when fresh.**

**Potato and Tomato Curry**

400 g new potatoes, cubed, 1.5 cm wide

1 large onion diced

1tbsp minced ginger (fresh or from a jar)

1tbsp minced garlic (fresh or from a jar)

200 g tinned chopped tomatoes

1tsp cumin seed

1tsp mustard seeds

1 tsp ground cumin

1 tsp ground coriander

½ - 1 tsp chilli powder (depending on how hot you like it)

1 tsp garam masala

1 tsp mixed curry powder (or just add ½ tsp more of the ground cumin and coriander)

2 tbsp vegetable oil

Handful of dried fenugreek leaves (use fresh coriander as an alternative but it will taste different)

Method:

Heat oil in saucepan, add cumin and mustard seeds and heat for a minute or so til they splutter (make sure they don’t burn).

Add onions and stir on a medium high heat til soft and translucent

Add ginger and garlic and stir til brown (careful not to burn)

Add ground spices and salt and stir thoroughly for a couple of minutes.

Add dried fenugreek.

Add tomatoes, stir well and simmer for about 10 minutes til oil separates.

Add potatoes and stir til coated in tomatoes.

Add a couple of tablespoons of water and simmer potatoes, occasionally stirring, for about 15 – 20 minutes til they are done. Add more water if the mixture sticks to saucepan.

Serve with fresh white rice or roti.

**Five Spice Fried Vegetables**

The key to this dish, and what makes it taste distinct from the fried vegetable recipe earlier, is the use of “panch phoran” – a Bangladeshi five spice mixture made up of equal quantities (by volume) of fenugreek seeds, cumin seeds, nigella seeds, fennel seeds and black mustard seeds. You can buy it ready-made or make up your own very easily. You can use whatever vegetables you like, but this is my favourite combination:

**Ingredients:**

**1 teaspoon panch phoran**

½ a cauliflower, broken up into small florets and boiled for 2 minutes.

1 large carrot / 2 medium ones, cut into 3 cm long, 3 mm thick slices.

Large handful of green beans chopped into 2 -3 cm long pieces.

(Some sliced white cabbage works very well with this too)

1 large onion, sliced

2 – 3 tablespoons vegetable oil

½ teaspoon turmeric

Salt to taste

**Method:**

Heat the oil in a pan.

Add the panch phoran to the pan and fry for about a minute – make sure it does not burn as this will ruin the flavour.

Add onions and fry til soft

Add vegetables and stir well, ensuring all veg is coated in oil.

Add turmeric and salt.

**Stir fry on high heat til vegetables done to your liking.**