

Thanjai

Sambar



Did you know that as of July 2020 almost 14 million Canadians are willing to reduce their meat consumption? The majority of Canada's vegetarians are under the age of 35 and so the rate of vegetarianism amongst the population is only expected to increase. Many people have recently decided to adopt a meat-free diet for many reasons, including efforts to reduce their carbon footprint and their concerns about animal welfare.

Regardless of the reason, it is often difficult for new vegetarians or vegans to find good replacements for protein. However, the difficulty doesn't lie in a lack of plant-based proteins available - rather, it lies in the lack of awareness and knowledge of places to get protein from non-meat sources. When you find yourself in this position, look up any South Indian restaurants in your local area and they are guaranteed to have plenty of delicious vegetarian options to suit your taste preferences and supplement your health requirements. One South Indian dish that illustrates this perfectly is sambar.

You have to really try to not hear about sambar when you enter a South Indian restaurant. The dish is a classic all across South India, and even in its northern counterpart.

What is Sambar? What is Sambar Made Of?

Translated to English, sambar is the Indian word for a special stew made out of vegetables, lentils, and a unique mix of spices. Both sour and spicy, sambar is often served with rice, idli, or dosa. Let's dive into the key ingredients of sambar.

1. The foundation of any sambar dish is the lentils/dal. Sambar is normally made with toor dal. Some variations of sambar include combining the toor dal with moong or masoor dal. Toor dal is also known as split pigeon peas lentil in English, while masoor dal is known as red lentil.

2. The next most important ingredient are the vegetables. Sambar is made with an extremely large variation of vegetables like pearl onion, pulses, tomatoes, pumpkin, eggplant, okra - to name just a few.

3. Following the spices is the sambar powder, which is a spice mix consisting of several spices mixed together. These spices include chana dal, coriander seeds, red chillies, cumin, mustard seeds, and cloves.

4. Finally, to add both a mouth-watering tart and sweetness to the dish, tamarind and jaggery is included in the mix as well.

Why is sambar good for your health?

The interesting part about sambar is that it is made of a superfood ingredient, unbeknownst to most people - pulses.

Pulses is a category of food that includes dry beans, chickpeas, and lentils. (In other words, the staple to pretty much any and all Indian dishes.) They are brilliant for its sustainability, health, and price. In fact, in honor of the International Year of Pulses in 2016, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations released an interesting and informative article on its health benefits and history.



According to the UN, though pulses are tiny, they have twice as much protein than wheat, and triple the amount of protein found in rice. Plus, it has the added benefits of no antibiotics or hormones, as is found in animal production. Pulses are so incredibly good for your health that a 2004 study of people over the age of 70 in three different cultures around the world found that just two spoonfuls of pulses a day reduced the risk of dying by 8%. If you're looking for more fun facts on pulses, check out @LovePulses on Twitter.

Though pulses provide a source of fibre as well, sambar gains more fibre from its other ingredients too. The variety of vegetables used in the dish are a breeding ground for fibres and rich antioxidants. Fibres are great in meals, especially for weight reduction, because even though it takes longer to digest, it stimulates feelings of being full and thus mitigates binge eating or overeating.

Health coach, Luke Coutinho, also discusses the amazing benefits of sambar due to another imperative ingredient - drumsticks, also known as moringa. Drumsticks are also used frequently in Thailand and Burma in seafood curries. Moringa is extremely healthy to the point where every part of the tree can be and has been used in traditional medicine. It has even made its way into American health food stores. Drumstick leaves are particularly rich in Vitamin C and iron. NDTV Food even goes as far to say that drumsticks are almost "organic by default" because they do not need much tending in its growth. So if you're finding it difficult to be healthy during quarantine, or maintain your meat-free diet, try ordering in sambar from your favorite South Indian restaurant. And then, let us know what you think of the dish!