

Pea soup ♥ Dhal

Here are my recipes for a pair of staple comfort dishes that, despite being from antipodes, cook almost the same.

I attended a research workshop at the Laurence Livermore National Lab* back in February. When I go to Livermore, I have to rent a small place so I can cook for myself a bit and not come home completely bloated. Since this was 2025, food was EXPENSIVE, CITATION NEEDED so I bought the stuff to

*The Laurence Livermore lab is named after physicist Ernest Lawrence, and is situated in Livermore, CA. So don't be me and look for a scientist named Lawrence Livermore. ☹️

make Quebec-style pea soup. It's a rich, comforting meal that I tweaked to make vegan.

So I make a big pot (there is no way to make small amounts of pea soup) and strut some for lunch at the lab. Asking for microwave access was an un-subtle humble brag — no regret. In the kitchenette, I run across extraordinary colleague Eisha, who is eating something that smells heavenly but looks very similar to what I brought. She proceeds to give me her dhal recipe, and I was dumbstruck at how it was just like my pea soup, but thicker and spicier. Legumes and starches comfort people all around the world. We are more alike than we think.

The key to superior flavor: BRAISE before boil

Self-learned cooks like me may think of soup as: boil water/broth, drop stuff in, wait, enjoy. It does work, but you can do better and faster by first braising the spice and vegetables. In particular, sauté your onion and garlic (making food taste good since the dawn of time), and once they express their caramel, add other veggies and a paste made of oil and spices. Once everything is mixed and well acquainted, put in a bit of water to keep the pot wet, lower heat, cover and let the ★ magic ★ happen. Braising the flavour base in this manner ~~the~~ expresses and cooks tasteful components in a way that boiling does not.

Once the vegetables are well braised, flood the pot with broth (chefs would first deglace with mine, but I'm a peasant) and cook your washed peas or lentils.

Hey, where's the salt?!

The two following recipes don't explicitly mention salting because it's mainly a matter of personal taste. I salt at the end of cooking, to set the final taste. Chefs also put a generous pinch at the braising step. You do you.



I am Benoit Hamelin
benoit@benoithamelin.com

Source of this paper:



<http://benoithamelin.com/papers/20250512-pea-soup-dhal>

Quebec-style pea soup*

*Veguish, therefore inauthentic**
**No refund

Ingredients:

- 2 yellow onions
- 3-4 garlic cloves
- 2-3 carrots
- 3 celery stalks
- 1 cup yellow split peas
- 4 ~~1/2~~ cups vegetable broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tbsp thyme

Steps

- 1° Chop the onions, garlic, carrots and celery.
- 2° Put a pot on medium heat on the stove. Once it reaches the temperature, pour 2-3 ~~1/2~~ ¹cup neutral oil and start frying the onions.
- 3° When the onions start discolouring, toss in the garlic.

4° When the onions start browning, add carrots and celery, as well as the bay leaves and thyme. Toss these around a bit.

5° Pour in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water. Lower heat to low and cover. Let it cook for 12-15 minutes, ensuring the pot does not dry up.

6° Rinse the peas, then put in the pot. Toss a bit.

7° Pour in the broth. Raise heat to medium-high and bring to a boil while tossing, to avoid sticking.

8° Lower heat to low and cover. Let simmer for 45 minutes before checking if peas are cooked.

9° Serve with young mild cheddar and crackers or good hot bread.

Dhal tadka*

*Probably not authentic**
**No refund

Ingredients

- 2 yellow onions
- 3-4 garlic cloves
- 1 chunk of ginger
- 2-3 carrots
- 3 celery stalks
- 1 cup red lentils
- 2 cups vegetable broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 3 cardamum pods, cracked
- 2 chili peppers
- 2 tbsp ajinomoto
- 2 tbsp turmeric
- 1 tbsp cumin powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp cinnamon

Steps

- 1° Chop the onions, garlic, ginger, carrots and celery.
- 2° In a pot at medium heat, drop 2-3 ~~1/2~~ ¹cup neutral oil and fry the onions until it starts discolouring.
- 3° Add garlic. Toss about until onions start browning.

4° Add ginger, carrots, celery. Toss about.

4.5° Mix the spices in a small dish with some oil, forming a soft paste.

5° Put in bay leaves, cardamum pods and the spice paste. Toss to cover the vegetables in spices.

5.5° Pour in $\frac{1}{3}$ cup water and set heat to low. Cover and let cook for 12-15 minutes, ensuring the pot does not dry.

6° Rinse the lentils and add to the pot. Toss about.

7° Pour in the broth. Raise heat to medium-high and bring to a boil while tossing, to avoid sticking.

8° Set heat to low and cover. Let cook for 15 minutes, or until lentils are done.

9° Serve with basmati rice and hot naan bread.