

PIGEON DALCHA

A *Dalcha* is a *Hyderabadi* incarnation of the every-familiar *Parsi Dhansak*. It is therefore a lentil dish and typically features mutton but it is here made with pigeon breast, which has a flavour that works well with lentils and very much with spices. Alongside is a *Beetroot Sabzi*, a sauté of diced beetroot with spices, curry leaves, toasted dals and coconut. As accompaniments a lemon rice is a southern-Indian favourite also featuring toasted dals, and a spiky yoghurt chutney completes the spread.

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 3-4)

- ❖ 6 pigeon breasts, skinned
- ❖ 1 tsp crushed garlic
- ❖ 1 tsp grated ginger
- ❖ Garam masala, a few pinches
- ❖ *Lentils*: 4 tbsp mung dal and 4 tbsp red lentils (or just use 8 tbsp red lentils)
- ❖ ¼ tsp turmeric
- ❖ Salt
- ❖ 2½ tbsp sunflower or vegetable oil
- ❖ *Whole spices*: 4 cardamoms, 4 cloves and 1½" cinnamon stick
- ❖ 10 curry leaves
- ❖ 75-100g onion, sliced into half-rings
- ❖ 1 green chilli, finely chopped
- ❖ 125ml game, chicken or meat stock
- ❖ 2-3 tbsp tamarind paste, or to taste
- ❖ *Tarka*: 2 dried red chillies, 10 curry leaves, ½ tsp cumin seeds ½ tsp black mustard seeds

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine the garlic and ginger. Rub half of this over the pigeon breasts along with a few pinches of garam masala and leave to marinate for an hour or two.
2. Meanwhile, soak the lentils in several changes of cold water for 20 mins then drain and put in a saucepan with 450ml cold water and bring to the boil. Skim away the scum then add the turmeric and ½ tsp salt and simmer for 15-20 mins until the lentils are soft. Using a stick blender, pulse to a coarse, saucy consistency then



Pigeon Dalcha, Beetroot Sabzi, Lemon Rice, Yoghurt Chutney

3. Heat 1½ tbsp oil in a sauté pan and, when hot, add the whole spices and curry leaves. When the spices crackle, add the pigeon breasts and fry over a medium-high heat for 1 min each side to seal then transfer them to a plate, cover and rest.
4. Put the onion and green chilli in the pan and sauté until the onion is golden. Add the stock, lentils, tamarind paste and 6-8 tbsp of the lentil cooking water. Simmer gently for 10-15 mins to create a creamy gravy.
5. Slice the pigeon breasts on the diagonal then add to the pan along with the resting juices and gently warm through.
6. Fry the ingredients for the *tarka* in a separate pan in the remaining 1 tbsp of oil for about 1 min. When fragrant, pour over the *Dalcha*, give it a quick stir and serve.

SEASONAL SIDE

BEETROOT SABZI

Heat 1 tbsp sunflower or vegetable oil in a sauté pan and add a pinch of asafoetida (optional), ¼ tsp black mustard seeds, ¼ tsp cumin seeds, 2 tsp urad dal and 2 tsp chana dal (both optional). When the seeds have toasted and the dals are golden add 1 large and thickly-sliced garlic clove, 1 finely chopped green chilli, 1 dried red chilli and 10 curry leaves. Sauté until the garlic becomes aromatic. Next add 400g peeled beetroot cut into ½" dice and stir-fry over a medium heat for 2 mins. Add a splash of water, turn the heat to low, cover and cook until the beetroot has softened to preference (make sure there is always a little water in the pan), approx 30 mins. Add a pinch of turmeric and ¼ tsp salt (or to taste) then cook, uncovered, stirring regularly for a further 2 mins until there is barely any liquid left. Stir in 1-2 tbsp grated coconut and serve.