

BLACK LENTIL AND OKRA STEW

By Steve Sloane

My friend Llama from Tibet told me that he uses his pressure cooker to cook black lentils on his day off. He makes plenty for his family and it lasts all week. He uses black lentils because they are the highest source of protein. They are really dense and not flat like other lentils. They are also called black mapte beans. You would need to plan ahead and cook them for several hours, but like my friend, I use a pressure cooker so it will only take 45 minutes.

I have been using pressure cookers for years because they save energy, time, and nutrition. I like really great meals, but I don't like to take more than one hour to prepare them. My new pressure cooker is made by Sitram in France. It is completely safe and has a unique feature that anybody who has ever struggled with the cover can appreciate. The Sitram pressure cooker has no bayonet openings and the cover fits as easily as a regular lid!

My new pressure cooker from Sitram is called the "Speedo Timer" and I have the 6 liter size. It has a digital timer built into the cover. Bobby Flay loves this convenient model for cooking Mexican style pork and puts the timer in his pocket so that he doesn't forget it. I leave it right on top the way it comes, and stay within earshot to hear it beep.

I was with my wife shopping for a new car and saw Patel's big new Indian super-market. I immediately remembered Llama's comments about black lentils, so I went in to buy some. I bought a 2Lb. bag and also picked up 3 quarts of fresh okra.

Here is what I did when I got home:

Ingredients:

3 Tablespoons of fresh butter (I would ordinarily use light oil but was out of it and substituted butter)

2 cups of dried black lentils

1 quart water

3 cups of raw okra whole

½ medium onion diced

3 large cloves of garlic sliced thin

¼ cup pine nuts

¼ cup vermouth

1 big carrot chopped coarse
1 stalk of celery chopped coarse
½ bell pepper chopped coarse
1 cup chopped fresh parsley (save a few sprigs for garnish)
¼ teaspoon of dried thyme
½ teaspoon dried basil
Several turns of fresh black pepper
1.5 cups of raw brown rice
3 more cups of water

Procedure:

Melt the butter on low heat
Slowly sauté the onions until nearly clear
Add the garlic and slowly sauté
Add the pine nuts and slowly sauté
All this sautéing might take about 10 minutes and while you are waiting you can be preparing the rest
I hope that you know that you should rinse beans and drain them and then throw them in the pot
Add the veggies
Add the wine
Add the quart of water
Add the herbs and pepper
Stir it up with a long handled spoon
Put the cover on and give it a twist. So easy!
Bring the heat up to medium on a commercial burner, like mine or high on a conventional to make it steam. The pressure regulator will steam around the bottom when the pressure is achieved.
Reduce the heat to low on a commercial and low medium on a convention burner.

The regulator should continue to steam around the bottom, but not too much.

Set the timer for 45 minutes.

Relax. This pressure cooker is fool-proof. You couldn't blow it if you tried.

In a separate pan make the brown rice using twice as much water as rice using low heat and loose lid. I don't add salt because my wife and daughter don't like it. I can always add it.

After the timer beeps in 45 minutes, pick up the pressure cooker and place it in the sink. My Sitram has great stay cool handles. I am not kidding. Even after 45 minutes of cooking under pressure which means at temperatures well above normal boiling, the handles are so cool that pot holders are not required. Really. This is a first class piece of cookware and the simplified cover is the most convenient that I have ever used. And the construction of the pot itself, with 18/10 stainless and a 5mm thick aluminum bottom is great even without the pressure cover. You can substitute a standard cover and use it as the best stew pot in your kitchen for brisket.

But I digress. Run cold water over the top of your pressure cooker for about a minute to reduce the pressure. Then simply twist the top of the cover and remove it. Do not force the cover open. If it doesn't come right off, run some more cold water on it until it does.

This came out great, and the rice was ready at about the same time!

Presentation:

We served it side by side with rice and decorated the perimeter of our plates with sliced wedges of field fresh tomato and planted a parsley garnish between the rice and beans. I added sea salt and this dish is a WINNER!

I added salt because I like it and my doctor told me to "Get some good sea salt and don't be afraid to use it." My daughter Heidi tasted it plain and liked it but said, "adding the salt made it sing". If for health reasons you cannot enjoy salt, use some fresh lemon juice and enjoy the tasty music.

Product Review:

This was just the maiden voyage for my new "Speedo Timer" from Sitram. Leave it to the French. The convenience and quality are second to none and likewise the simplicity of the pressure mechanism.

I am experienced with Fagor and have even demonstrated it on TV making lentil soup in 6 minutes. Regular lentils are much faster and I can do it on any pressure cooker. But I found that the Fagor's cover stuck and was like most pressure cookers, let's face it, a bit awkward. My friend told me that his Fagor scorched his beans because it didn't have sufficient aluminum in the bottom. They skimp to make it less expensive and over the years you will pay the price back with poor performance and inconvenience.

I am also experienced with Kuhn Rikon and my original recipe is in their first American cookbook. They make fine equipment, but the Sitram is newer and better. The pressure mechanism is simpler and the

cover is easier and more convenient. Like all Sitram real commercial quality stainless steel cookware, it is made in France and the pricing is fair.

Like Bobby Flay, I love it too.

Enjoy!