

RASAM

The meaning of Rasam is “juice”, but in Southern India, it is a light tomato and tamarind based soup seasoned with spices such as turmeric, cumin and fenugreek seeds. A salty and sour thin tomato based liquid, unbelievably tasty, healthy and a potent tonic to make you feel good. The key for Rasam lies in a mixture of curry leaves, ginger, garlic, shallots and green or red chilli.

INGREDIENTS

For the mix:

3 small shallots (peeled and finely chopped)
5g fresh curry leaves
1 large green chilli (chopped; discard the seeds if prefer less heat)
10g garlic cloves
10g ginger (peeled and roughly chopped)

For the first temper:

50g vegetable oil
2g mustard seeds
2g cumin seeds
Small pinch fenugreek seeds
10 fresh curry leaves

For the main body:

2g ground turmeric
2g ground coriander
1 pinch asafoetida
1kg vine tomatoes (washed and chopped)
100g tamarind water *see notes
400g coconut milk
400g water
½ bunch coriander leaves (washed, dried and finely chopped)
Salt, sugar and lemon juice to taste

Method:

1. Mix the shallots, curry leaves, green chilli, ginger and garlic, crush in a pestle and mortar (you can use an electric blender but the mix from the pestle and mortar gives more flavour).
2. Heat the vegetable oil on a medium heat in a wide based pan.
3. Add the mustard seeds, allow to splutter, then add the cumin and fenugreek seeds. Cook until golden brown.
4. Add the curry leaves and then the crushed mixture of shallots, curry leaves, green chilli, ginger and garlic. Cook to a light golden brown colour.

5. Add the tomatoes to sizzle and deglaze the pan, bringing all the flavours of the spices together. Add the turmeric, ground coriander and asafoetida and cook for 1 minute.
6. Add the tamarind water, water and coconut milk and bring to the boil. Cook for 15 minutes to break down the tomatoes.
7. Then reduce the heat, season with salt and sugar, and taste. If the tamarind hasn't given enough acidity, add some lemon juice to evenly balance the salt, sugar and acids. Rasam should be more acidic and salty, creating a balanced harmony of flavour due to the heat.
8. Allow the Rasam to stand but do not reduce. For a smooth texture blend in a mixer or a high-speed blender and pass through a fine mesh strainer at least twice. When passing through the strainer do not push the mix through, but instead, tap the handle of the strainer for the juices to trickle down. Whatever remains inside the strainer can then be discarded – or spread over toast with a few slices of mozzarella or cheddar cheese, it's delicious!
9. If you find the Rasam too thick due to blending and passing, simply add more water to bring it to the desired thin water consistency. The colour should be orange/red and should have a strong aroma of tomato.

10. If serving as soup, bring the Rasam to the boil and portion into cups, garnish with coriander leaves and serve immediately.

VARIATIONS ON THE BASIC TOMATO RASAM

PINEAPPLE RASAM

Rasam
20ml oil
200gm of peeled and finely diced pineapple

Method:

1. Follow the above recipe to make the Rasam.
2. Heat 20ml oil.
3. Add the chopped pineapple and sauté until the pineapple starts losing water.
4. Pour over the Rasam and mix, then bring to boil; hold the boil for 1 minute.
5. Pass the mixture through a fine mesh strainer. Press with the back of a ladle to transfer every drop of the pineapple juice into the Rasam.
6. The Rasam should have an intensified taste of the pineapple sugars. If necessary adjust the flavour using more salt and lemon juice.
7. To serve, garnish with diced pineapple and coriander leaves.

MORE TOMATO RASAM

Rasam
20ml oil
2 medium vine tomatoes (quartered, deseeded and diced)

Method:

1. Follow the above recipe to make the Rasam.
2. Heat 20ml oil in a wide base sauté pan.
3. Add the diced tomatoes and sauté over high heat.
4. Add the prepared tomato Rasam, bring to boil and check the seasoning.
5. To serve, garnish with more chopped vine tomatoes and coriander leaves. ●

NOTES & TIPS

- * Remember the Rasam should be salty and sour – this brings the potent flavour and nutritional value in the Rasam. Keep it simple and use the garnishes wisely. Always serve piping hot.
- * Rasam is often served at step 6, but to make it more refined and exciting follow the steps from 7 to 9.
- * To extract tamarind water, soak 1 part fresh tamarind with 4 parts water. Using your fingertips and palms, work the tamarind as if you are kneading a dough. This loosens the pulp, which then mixes with water. Do this for 3 to 4 minutes. Pass through a strainer, pressing with the back of the ladle to extract maximum pulp. Discard what remains in the strainer. The resulting smooth liquid should be the consistency of water (if not simply stir in more water). Store in a glass jar with an air-tight lid in the freezer (shelf life – 7 days maximum). You can buy ready made tamarind water but it doesn't have the same flavour as a home-made one.