

# October Spice Club:

## Panch Phoron



Panch Phoron is a traditional spice blend that originates from the eastern regions of India and Bangladesh. Its name is translated to "five spices" in Bengali, reflecting the five distinct seeds that make up this unique mixture.

Fenugreek seeds (methi) impart a slight bitterness and a subtle maple-like aroma, while nigella seeds (kalonji) bring a touch of earthiness and a mild onion flavor. Cumin seeds (jeera) provide a warm, nutty essence, and black mustard seeds (rai) contribute a pungent, spicy kick. Fennel seeds (saunf) add a gentle sweetness and a mild licorice note to the mixture. These seeds are typically used in equal proportions, allowing them to complement one another in perfect balance.

Panch Phoron is employed in a variety of ways, primarily as a tempering, where it is briefly roasted in hot oil or ghee, becoming infused with the aromatic blend. This infused oil is then used as a flavorful base for a multitude of dishes, including vegetables, lentils, and fish.

Beyond its regional roots, Panch Phoron has gained popularity in global cuisine, becoming a favorite among chefs and home cooks alike who appreciate its ability to elevate a wide range of dishes.

## Red Split Lentil Dal

Torrie True, Chilli and Mint

“I eat this dish all year round and like to change the consistency from a more runny, soupy dish to a thicker dal that may be eaten the Indian way, with your hands, accompanied by some rice or naan. When the months turn colder, I tend to gravitate more and more towards dals and soups to warm me up so this really is the perfect autumn meal to give me that inner glow.”

200g red split lentils (masoor dal)  
500ml of water, add more if you would like a thinner consistency  
1 tbsp oil (mustard, vegetable, or sunflower oil)  
1 ½ tsp panch phoron  
2 fresh chilies (red or green), chopped in half  
1 tsp turmeric  
1 tsp salt  
5 cherry tomatoes, quartered (or carrots, zucchini, eggplant, peas, etc.)  
*To serve:* fresh chopped cilantro, lemon wedge

Boil a pot of water; while you wait, rinse the red split lentils under the tap to thoroughly clean them. Add lentils to the boiling water and continue boiling for 10 minutes on a low heat; the lentils will become less orange in color during this time. If you are going to add a carrot, you will need to add it to the lentils at this stage so that they are soft in time. Please note you may need to add more water if the water is completely soaked up by the lentils.

In a frying pan over medium-high heat, warm the oil; when it is hot, add the panch phoron, fresh chili and turmeric. Once the panch phoron begins to pop and release the flavors – this will be around 15 seconds – give it a quick stir and then add a ladleful of the watery dal into the frying pan and mix the ingredients together.

Now place the contents of the frying pan back into the main pot with the red split lentils and stir.

Add the quartered tomatoes (or other veg you used) at this state and simmer gently for a few minutes. Add salt to taste. If you want it more soupy, add more water; and if you like it thicker, let it simmer for longer. Serve with cilantro and lemon or lime wedges. Serves 2.

# Aloo Kohra Sabji

## (Vegan Potatoes & Pumpkin)

Anadi Misra, Cooking with Anadi

2-3 tbsp olive oil	1 tsp garam masala
1 pinch of asofoetida	½ pumpkin, skinned, deseeded and diced into ½- inch cubes
1 tbsp panch phoron	salt to taste
½ red onion, finely diced	water as needed
½ tsp turmeric	chopped cilantro, for garnish
3-4 garlic cloves	1-2 tbsp lemon juice for garnish
1-inch piece ginger	
3-4 green chilies	
1 tsp ground coriander	

Add ginger, garlic, and green chilies to a food processor with some water and puree until smooth.

Heat a wok or pot on medium heat and once the oil is hot, add the panch phoron and asofoetida. Cook for about 30 seconds to a minute; once fragrant, add onions. Stir well and cook until the onions become lightly fried.

Add turmeric and stir well. Continue cooking and stirring the onion for a few minutes. Once golden brown, add the pureed ginger, garlic and green chili. Continue to stir and cook until the mixture starts to thicken up. Add ground coriander and garam masala and mix. Add water as needed if mixture starts to stick.

Continue to cook this masala until some oil is released on the sides. Add water as required and stir until this stage. Then, add potatoes and mix well. Add the pumpkin right after and mix well to coat with the masala. Add salt and 1 cup water, and mix well.

Reduce heat to medium low and cover the wok/pot with a lid. Every 5-7 minutes, remove the lid and stir the veggies before putting the lid back on. Repeat this until the veggies are tender and add more water if needed.

Stir in freshly chopped cilantro and garnish with lemon juice. Serve hot with your choice of side: kachori, puri, naan, rice, etc.

Anadi's video is very helpful in understanding the desired consistency of the dish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o81ZATWZCQA>

## *Suggested Reading on Indian Cuisine*

Simon Daley with Roshan Hirani, *Cooking with my Indian mother-in-law*

Suneeta Vaswani, *Easy Indian cooking*

Asma Khan, *Ammu: Indian home cooking to nourish your soul*

Madhur Jaffrey, *Madhur Jaffrey's instantly Indian cookbook*

Chitra Agrawal, *Vibrant India: fresh vegetarian recipes from Bangalore to Brooklyn*

Maya Kaimal MacMillan, *Curried favors: family recipes from South India*