Basmati Rice with Mung Beans Recipe

Ingredients: Serves 4-6

225g basmati rice
150g skinless mung beans (mung dhal)
50g ghee or unsalted butter
1 teaspoon cumin seeds
1 teaspoon black peppercorns
2.5cm piece root ginger, grated or minced
15-20 curry leaves
1½ teaspoons salt
50g raw cashews, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander leaves

Method:
Wash the rice and the mung beans in several changes of water and soak them, separately, for approximately 20 minutes. Drain thoroughly. Reserve 1 tablespoon of the ghee or butter and heat the remainder in a heavy-based saucepan over a low heat. Add the cumin seeds and the black peppercorns. Fry them for 15-20 seconds and add the ginger followed by the curry leaves. Fry them for 25-30 seconds. Add the rice and the beans, raise the heat slightly and saute for 2-3 minutes. Add the salt and pour in 700ml hot water. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat to very low and cover the pan tightly. Cook for 10 minutes and switch off the heat source. Leave the pan undisturbed for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, heat the reserved ghee or butter in a small pan over a low heat and fry the cashews until they are lightly browned. Using a metal spoon, transfer the rice onto a serving plate. Spread the chopped coriander leaves evenly on top followed by the fried cashews along with the ghee or butter in which they were fried. Serve with a vegetable, meat, poultry or fish curry. This delicious and easy-to-cook dish is known as Ven Pongal. It is made to celebrate New Year and the harvest festival as they coincide in January. The mung beans used are the skinless variety which you can buy in Indian stores. They cook very quickly and really complement the delicate grains of basmati rice. Traditionally ghee is used which gives the dish its distinctive taste. Alternatively, unsalted butter can be used, but take care not to burn it. 2-3 tablespoons sunflower oil can also be used if you want to avoid saturated fat.

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