

Idlis

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Idlis are savory, spicy, tangy dumplings from the southern part of India, sort of a matzo ball running a cash register at the Quicky-Mart. Except, Indian being tremendously superior to my native Jewish cuisine, idlis are actually delicious. They are almost always served with sambar, a coconut and lentil-based vegetable soup. The recipe I use is kiped directly from Madhur Jaffrey's "World of the East Vegetarian Cooking," an indispensable book.

Idlis are ridiculously easy to make.

2 tbs vegetable oil

1 tsp black mustard seeds

1 c dry cream of wheat

3 tbs fresh grated (or 4 tbs frozen grated) coconut

3/4 tsp salt

one or two minced green chilies (like a serrano)

1-1/2 c plain yogurt (the sourer, the better)

Heat the oil over a high flame, then add the mustard seeds. In a few seconds, they'll be popping, at which time, turn the heat down to medium and add the cream of wheat. Stir with a spatula for a minute or two until the raw odor and taste have cooked out but the cream of wheat has not yet browned. Add the green chilies, coconut, and salt, then let the pan cool to a warmish temperature. Stir in the yogurt.

Prepare a steamer. Now grease your idli molds; you DO have idli molds, don't you? If you don't (har, har), use some sort of perforated, bowl-like object (like a steamer basket) and line it with cheesecloth. Spoon in the batter to a depth of 1/2 inch or so, place in the steamer, and give it a good 20-25 minutes of a schvitz.

Serving: While the idlis are cooking, you should be finishing up your sambar. Unmold the idlis (and if you did the steamer-basket number, slice the mega-idli up into fat wedges), place in the center of a wide, shallow bowl, then ladle in your sambar and garnish with some chopped cilantro and diced tomato.

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