

3 Days, 3 Ways: Lentils **February 2009**

Basic Cooked Lentils

To cook enough lentils for three dishes that serve two people at each meal:

Ingredients: 3 c. of dried brown lentils (approx. 6 c. when cooked)
6 c. of water
2 Tbs. olive oil
1 bay leaf

- Combine all ingredients in a large pot.
- Bring lentils to a boil over medium-high heat; simmer until soft enough for your taste (about 25 minutes).
- Drain; rinse briefly under cold water. Store in refrigerator, covered, for use in the following recipes.

Cooking Tip: If you or members of your family have digestive problems when eating dried legumes, try soaking the lentils first for a couple of hours, then discard the soaking water. The trisaccharides in dried legumes that are difficult for humans to digest are water soluble, so most of them are discarded along with the water.

Day One: Lentil Salad with Feta, Walnuts and Parsley

(adapted from a recipe by Victorian Wise)

This wonderful dish makes an excellent room-temperature salad and only improves as the days go by. It's very easy to assemble!

Ingredients: ½ c. walnut halves
2–2.5 cups cooked lentils
3 scallions, trimmed and thinly sliced
2 Tbs. chopped, fresh flat-leaf parsley
1/4 c. freshly squeezed lemon juice
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1/3 c. walnut oil or extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 c. feta cheese, coarsely crumbled

- In a dry skillet over medium heat, toast the walnuts until hot, fragrant, and lightly toasted.
- Place lentils, walnuts, scallions, parsley, lemon juice, salt, pepper and oil in a large bowl and mix.
- Sprinkle the feta over the mixture.
- Using your hands or a spoon, mix the salad thoroughly.
- Drizzle a little extra oil on top.
- Serve with crusty bread.

Day Two: Creamed Lentil Soup with Lemon

This is an admittedly homely-looking dish, but its flavor is wonderful. It's perfect for a bleak and snowy day.

Ingredients: 1 c. cooked lentils
2 Tbs. olive or peanut oil
2 c. water
1 medium onion, chopped
1 c. heavy cream
¼ tsp. whole cumin seed, toasted and ground
2 tsp. lemon juice
salt and pepper

- Heat 2 Tbs. of oil in a saucepan; sauté onion until it becomes transparent.
- Add cooked lentils and water; stir, then bring to a simmer.
- While the lentils are simmering, toast the cumin seed in a dry heavy skillet over medium heat. They're done when you can smell them and they have become a bright red-brown. Pour them onto a countertop or chopping block and grind to a powder with the bottom of a heavy bottle, pan or mortar and pestle.
- Transfer onion, lentils and water to a food mill or blender. Blend until smooth. Add water if needed until you get a thick texture that can be further thinned with cream.
- Return the soup to the pot; add 1 c. of heavy cream. Bring back to a simmer.
- Add toasted cumin seed and salt and pepper to taste (lentil soup can absorb an amazing amount of salt before it tastes right, but add salt gradually). Squeeze in the lemon juice.
- Serve with crusty bread and a green salad.

Cooking Tip: One of the reasons lentils often taste so bland is that they need acidity to offset their earthiness. Squeezing a bit of lemon or lime juice or adding a bit of tamarind paste to any lentil dish will improve its taste considerably.

Day Three: Indian-style Lentils with Potatoes

This is a hearty dish with complex flavor. True, it calls for a number of ingredients. But they're easy to assemble, add color and texture, and the resulting flavor is exquisite. If possible, make this dish the day before you serve it so all of the flavors have a chance to marry, or allow it to sit out at room temperature for at least an hour.

Ingredients:

- 1 c. cooked lentils
- 1 Tbs. olive or peanut oil
- 2 Tbs. Patek's mild curry paste
- ½ red onion, peeled and coarsely chopped or sliced
- 1 or 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 1 14-oz. can Muir Glen whole organic tomatoes (not plum tomatoes), drained and coarsely chopped
- 1 or 2 thinly sliced (deseeded) jalapeño peppers
- 4 small white or yellow potatoes, quartered
- ½ c. coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ c. coarsely chopped fresh mint
- 1 lime
- salt and pepper

- Place quartered potatoes in pot and add enough water to just cover them. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat and cook for 10-15 minutes, or until a fork can be easily inserted into the potatoes. Strain the water off and set aside the potatoes.
- Heat oil in a hot pan; add curry paste to soften and heat it. Add curry paste to lentils.
- Add onion, garlic, tomatoes, jalapeño, and cooked potatoes to bowl. Using your hands, gently combine all of the ingredients until they are evenly covered in the curry paste mixture.
- Add chopped cilantro and mint. Taste, then add salt and pepper.
- Squeeze fresh lime juice over the dish, then allow to sit out at room temperature for at least an hour before serving.