

Try leaning on lentils for better health

Lentils don't have to be the mush you remember being served in high school lunches. When cooked right, lentils are chewy yet tender, with the kind of feel and flavor you expect from comfort foods. So banish any unpleasant memories and take advantage of this highly versatile food.

Anyone who cooks with lentils appreciates their many benefits. For starters, lentils cook quickly because, unlike dried beans, they don't require soaking. They are also highly flexible in the way they can be used, from salads, dips and soups to stews and toppings for whole grains like rice or couscous.

Health experts love lentils because they are rich in vitamins, minerals and the phytochemicals that help protect your body from cancer and other chronic diseases. Popular in many parts of Europe, India and the Middle East, this fiber-packed legume has long been used to inexpensively extend dishes with hearty bulk. But leave it to the French to raise lentils to a high culinary level — their small, green variety is considered a delicacy in France.

Many types of lentils are grown throughout the world. Brown lentils are the ones most commonly seen in American supermarkets, although red and yellow lentils can also be found,



Top notch: Crunchy Lentil Salad is a healthy meal

especially in specialty markets. Stored airtight at room temperature, they will keep up to a year.

Cooking them couldn't be simpler. First pick through them to remove debris and any broken or discolored lentils. Rinse them under cold water and place them in a pan along with a bay leaf and enough water or broth to cover by one inch. Cover and bring to a boil, then reduce the

heat to low and simmer 10 to 20 minutes, adding more liquid as necessary, until they are just tender. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

For a hot entrée, combine cooked lentils with a variety of chopped cooked vegetables and serve over cooked bulgur or rice. Or try this lentil salad, which will delight you with its style and pizzazz.

CRUNCHY LENTIL SALAD

- 1 cup dried green or brown lentils, sorted, rinsed and drained
- 2 1/2 cups reduced-sodium, low-fat chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 cups corn kernels
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

- 1/4 cup chopped red onion
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon fresh marjoram
- 1 teaspoon dried grated orange zest
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Place lentils and broth in medium pan. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer. Cover and cook for 25 to 30 minutes or until tender.

Drain in colander. Transfer to large bowl. Mix in corn, celery, parsley and onion. Let cool.

Meanwhile, in small bowl whisk together vinegar, oil, marjoram and zest.

When lentil mixture is at room temperature, drizzle dressing over top and toss lightly to mix in. Add salt and pepper to taste, if desired.

Serve warm or at room temperature. Store in refrigerator, tightly covered.

Makes 6 servings.

Nutritional information per serving: 230 calories, 8 g. total fat (less than 1 g. saturated fat), 37 g. carbohydrate, 12 g. protein, 12 g. dietary fiber, 279 mg. sodium.

Recipe courtesy of the American Institute for Cancer Research.

Share recipes that bring comfort, joy

Valentine's Day isn't just for lovers — it's a time for expressing love and affection for everyone — from your best friend to your mom.

We often say "I love you" to the special people in our life by preparing their favorite foods. We're collecting recipes prepared with love from readers to share in the Sunday, Feb. 10 edition of Pastimes.

Send your recipe, and short story about why this recipe is special, by Friday, Jan. 25, to: Lana Mini, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009.

Please include your name and telephone number so that we can contact you. Email information as a text file to: lmini@oe.com. homecomm.net or fax (248) 844-1314 or (734) 591-7279. For more information call Lana Mini (248) 901-2572.

Hearty soups will warm your winter meals

Winter is the perfect time to make a hearty soup. Following are a few recipes for the cold season.

LENTIL AND LEMON SOUP

- 1 cup lentils, soaked overnight in 1 cup water
- 6 cups nonfat chicken broth
- 1 yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon dried tarragon
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- Salt and pepper to taste (optional)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 4 thin slices of lemon

Bring the lentils to a boil in the broth. Reduce the heat and simmer until tender, approximately 15 minutes (if you have not pre-soaked the lentils, increase your cooking time by about 15 more minutes). While the lentils are cooking, sauté the onions in oil for 8 minutes or until they are golden brown. Remove from heat and set aside. When the lentils are tender, add the onions, herbs, salt and pepper. Cook for 2 minutes. Stir in the lemon juice and garnish with lemon slices.

CHINESE MUSHROOM NOODLE SOUP

- 1 Tablespoons vegetable oil

- 2 cups sliced mushrooms (6 oz./170g)

- 1 teaspoon minced garlic

- 4 cups chicken or vegetable stock

- 2 cups fresh chow mein noodles or 2 packets (3 oz./85g each Ramen noodles)

- 2 Tablespoons sherry or rice wine

- 1 Tablespoons sesame oil

- Dash of hot pepper sauce or hot chili oil

- 1/2 cup chopped scallions

In large saucepan, heat oil over medium heat; cook mushrooms and garlic for 2 minutes. Add stock

and 2 cups (500 mL) water; bring to boil. Add noodles, sherry, lemon juice or rice vinegar, sesame oil and hot pepper sauce; reduce heat, cover and simmer for 3 minutes. Stir in scallions.

You can find this recipe and other tasty and nutritious soups in Anne Lindsey's cookbook, *Lighthearted Everyday Cooking*.

ROASTED RED PEPPER SOUP

- 2 red bell peppers, quartered and seeds and stems removed
- 1 large sweet onion, peeled and cut into half-inch wedges

- 2 garlic cloves, peeled and halved

- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

- 1 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

- 1 can (13 3/4 oz.) reduced sodium chicken broth

- 1 can (15 1/2 oz.) Italian style plum tomatoes with juices

- 1 can (11 oz.) corn kernels, drained

- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

- 1/4 cup fresh cilantro

- leaves or coarsely chopped basil leaves, optional

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Combine peppers, onion, garlic and olive in a large baking dish. Bake 35 to 40 minutes, stirring occasionally until vegetables are tender and lightly browned. Cool slightly. Add chicken broth mixture with tomatoes. Transfer to a large saucepan. Add corn and simmer until heated through. Add pepper to taste, ladle into bowls and, if desired, garnish with fresh cilantro or basil.

Source: American Cancer Institute

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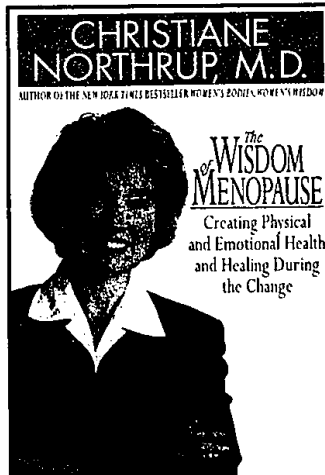
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