

02/16/10 - Weekday Lentil Soup

Lentils are one of the most nutritious foods on the planet used as part of a complete protein in vegetarian diets or used as a low calorie, vitamin and fibre rich part of any diet. There are many different colors of lentils, with different cooking times and textures. Lentils are a staple in the Middle and Near East and India, while cooked in some European countries also. They can be paired with rice, vegetables, meat, or fish. Spices like curry or cumin or just salt and pepper flavor them.



My mom always made lentils on a week night. Sometimes they had meat in them like short ribs or sausages (sarsicha), but mostly they were vegetarian. She used just plain brown lentils, the kind you get in any supermarket. They had a silky smooth texture and the flavors of parsley and cracked pepper were discernible in the mix. Their earthy taste is so comforting and satisfying, my own children love them still. We call them lentejas (pronounced len-te-zshas) in Ladino, a Jewish Spanish dialect. Many Sephardim make a dish called Mejedra, lentils and rice cooked in the same pot and topped with fried onions. Yum Yum!

This soup or stew is easy to make, healthy, and economical. Last night, we enjoyed lentils with Israeli salad, Spanish rice, and grilled chicken thighs. On Sunday, for Valentine's Day we ate lentils with grilled lamb chops, brown rice pilaf, sautéed broccolini, and fava beans with artichoke hearts. Both meals were so good, give them a try.

16 ounce package of dried lentils



1 large onion, diced

2 celery ribs, washed

2 carrots, washed and peeled

2 tablespoons olive oil

1/3 cup chopped cilantro, washed and dried

2/3 cup chopped parsley, washed and dried

1 and ½ teaspoon salt

Fresh cracked pepper

2 teaspoons cumin (optional)

3 quarts of cold water

Pour the lentils into a fine mesh colander or sieve. Run your fingers through them to check for any bad ones, rocks or other debris. Rinse the lentils and place them on a towel or in a bowl to drain.

Heat a stock pot or Dutch oven. Place the oil and then the onions in the pan to begin to sauté, turn the heat down to medium. While the onions start to cook, dice the celery and carrots very small. Chop the parsley and cilantro.



Add the celery and carrots after cutting them. Season the vegetables with salt and pepper. Add the parsley and cilantro and stir to combine. Next, add the lentils then add the water. Let the lentils simmer for about 1 hour. Check the lentils after 40 minutes for the desired texture. Add more salt and pepper to your taste.

Cook the lentils to the thickness you prefer. Some like them soupy or some like them thick. Lentils keep for several days, can be reheated easily, and they are great as left-overs for lunch.



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