

Get

cooking

The Low-Down on Lentils

They come in lots of lovely colours, are highly nutritious and don't taste half bad. In fact, there's a lot more going for lentils than you'd imagine! For those with not a lot of lolly, lentils have always been seen

as a cheap but important source of protein - hence the name 'poor man's meat'. With evidence mounting of meat's unhealthy influences, we reckon the poor man gets the last laugh with lentils!

India consumes the most lentils and grows over 50 varieties. In the West, we are more familiar with the red, orange, brown and green varieties - not forgetting the almost black French Puy lentils, for all you posh noshers out there! With their reputation of having to be soaked for eons of time then boiled to death, most people give lentils a wide berth. Thankfully, supermarkets now offer a huge range of lentils - dried, canned, no-soak varieties - just follow the packet instructions and away you go.

As a general rule of thumb the green and brown varieties as well as the Puy lentils tend to hold their shape once cooked. The red and orange types tend to go to mush so are best for soups, stews, dhals or lentil pate (see below).

If you had to compose a top-ten healthy food list, lentils would certainly be pretty near the top. Full of



Lentils in Red Wine with Mint

Serves 3-4

*1 tbsp olive oil
2 onions, coarsely chopped
1 red pepper, de-seeded and coarsely chopped
3 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped
230g Puy lentils, washed
230ml of dry red wine
200ml vegetable stock
½ red chilli, de-seeded and finely chopped
juice of half a lemon
1½ tbsp soya sauce
1 tsp balsamic vinegar
15g fresh mint leaves, rolled up and cut into thin strips*

- 1 Add olive oil to a large heavy pan over medium heat.
- 2 Fry onions, red pepper and garlic for five minutes, stirring constantly.
- 3 Add washed and drained lentils, pour red wine over and add vegetable stock to just cover lentils. Place lid on pan and simmer for 25-35 minutes stirring occasionally, until lentils are tender. Add extra boiling water or stock if necessary.
- 4 Five minutes before end of cooking time, add chilli. If chillies are a mild variety, add more to taste.
- 5 Add lemon juice, soya sauce and balsamic vinegar and adjust seasoning. Stir in mint before serving.

Serve with baked potatoes and salad and a dollop of plain soya yoghurt or sour cream.

Adapted from VEG by Catherine Mason - available from VVE, £12.99 (plus £2.00 p&p)

Photography:
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protein, fibre and starchy carbohydrates, they are also an excellent source of many minerals, particularly iron, zinc and selenium. They are easily digested and so when pureed, make a great first weaning food from six months on for veggie babies.

Egyptians, apparently, were very keen on feeding lentils to their offspring - to enlighten their minds, make them more cheerful and open their hearts! This actually makes nutritional sense - the slow-releasing carbohydrate, good quality protein and mineral content of lentils all help to balance blood sugar levels, iron out mood swings and help concentration at school. VVF says load those lentils on the lorries and get those kids lurching on them - like now!

Get cooking with these lentil meal samplers and we're sure you too will soon become lentil lovers!



Lentil Pate

55g wholewheat bread
 175g red lentils
 140ml water
 1 onion, finely chopped
 2 tbsp vegetable oil
 1 tbsp tahini (sesame seed paste)
 1 tsp dried rosemary
 ½ tsp dried thyme
 Pinch nutmeg
 1 tbsp finely chopped parsley
 1 tbsp miso (fermented soya bean paste) or soy sauce

- 1 Break bread into pieces, cover with water and soak for 20 minutes.
- 2 Cook lentils in water for 15 minutes or until tender. Rinse and drain.
- 3 Chop onion and fry gently in oil until beginning to brown.
- 4 Add lentils. Drain bread, squeeze as dry as possible and add to cooking mixture.
- 5 Stir in tahini, rosemary, thyme and nutmeg and cook over a low heat for about 5 minutes.
- 6 Stir in parsley and miso, beating well to amalgamate.
- 7 Turn out into oiled baking dish and bake for 30 minutes at 350°F/180°C/Gas Mark 5.
- 8 Stir and place in a serving dish.
- 9 Serve warm or cold with crusty rolls or bread.

Adapted from *Vegan Cooking For Everyone* by Leah Leneman - available from VVF, £14.99 (plus £2.00 p&p)

Fruity Brown Rice and Lentil Salad

Serves 4

50g long grain brown rice
 50g brown lentils
 1 small onion, peeled and grated
 ½ tsp root ginger, peeled and finely chopped
 3 dried dates, finely chopped
 3 dried apricots, finely chopped
 1 tbsp sultanas
 1 tbsp raisins
 1 tbsp vegetable oil
 seeds from 1 cardamon pod (discard husk)
 ½ tsp coriander seeds
 ¼ tsp ground cloves
 300ml water
 50ml fresh orange juice

- 1 Soak lentils in water for 2 hours, drain and place in pan of water. Boil for 10 minutes, drain and set aside.

- 2 Heat oil in a saucepan and fry onion and ginger until softened.
- 3 Add rice and lentils and stir for 1 minute.
- 4 Add remaining ingredients and combine well.
- 5 Bring to boil, cover and simmer gently for 30 minutes or until liquid has been absorbed and the mixture is thick.
- 6 Transfer to a covered container and chill before serving.

Adapted from *Vegan Barbecues and Buffets* by Linda Majzlik - available from VVF, £5.00 (plus £2.00 p&p)

