

Lentil Soup

4 TO 6 SERVINGS

This lentil soup is inspired by the flavors of Lebanese cuisine. The fresh spinach and chopped cilantro that go in at the last minute, along with the generous splash of freshly squeezed lemon juice, give the earthy lentils a bright, fresh burst of flavor.

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| <i>1½ cups green lentils</i> | <i>¾ teaspoon coriander seeds, toasted and ground</i> |
| <i>2 tablespoons olive oil</i> | <i>¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)</i> |
| <i>1 small onion, diced</i> | <i>2 quarts vegetable, chicken, or beef stock, or water</i> |
| <i>1 small carrot, diced</i> | <i>1 bunch spinach, leaves only, rinsed and roughly torn</i> |
| <i>1 small celery stalk, diced</i> | <i>Fresh lemon juice</i> |
| <i>Sea salt and freshly ground pepper</i> | <i>½ cup loosely packed cilantro leaves</i> |
| <i>2 large or 3 small garlic cloves, thinly sliced</i> | <i>Plain yogurt (optional)</i> |
| <i>1 teaspoon cumin seeds, toasted and ground</i> | |

Sort the lentils, removing any debris, and rinse thoroughly.

Pour the oil into a heavy-bottomed soup pot and heat over medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, and celery and sauté until tender, 5 to 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and add the garlic, cumin, coriander, and cayenne (if using).

Add the lentils and stock to the pot along with a few pinches of salt. Bring to a boil, skimming any foam off the surface. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook until the lentils are soft and fully cooked, 25 to 45 minutes.

Add the rinsed and torn spinach leaves and cook for a couple of minutes to wilt the spinach. Just before serving, squeeze a good amount of lemon juice into the soup and garnish each bowl with a sprinkling of cilantro. A dollop of yogurt makes a delicious garnish.

VARIATIONS

- ~ Any kind of lentil will do, or you can mix together different kinds.
- ~ For a wintertime variation, instead of spinach, add kale when the lentils are almost cooked through and add cubes of roasted winter squash just before serving.
- ~ In the summertime, peeled chunks of tomato complement the spinach, and basil can be substituted for the cilantro.
- ~ If using beef stock, a richer soup can be made by adding $\frac{1}{4}$ cup red wine to the mirepoix (onion, carrot, celery mixture) after it has fully softened. Cook the wine down for a few minutes then add the stock and beans. The cumin and coriander might be replaced with thyme, rosemary, or parsley—or a combination.

