

Home on the Range

Lentils Make A Come Back

Although lentils and dried beans have been eaten for centuries, it's only recently that they are becoming trendy in restaurants and elegant cooking. They are turning up in soups, stuffings, salads, sandwiches, casseroles, and more.

Lentils and beans are good for you. They are low in fat, calories, and sodium and high in carbohydrates, fiber and protein. And, they have no cholesterol.

Lentils are versatile, easy to prepare, quick to cook, inexpensive, satisfying and very nutritious. It takes a bit longer to prepare dried beans because they should be soaked eight hours before cooking. You can hurry this process by the quick soak method: Place 1 cup beans and 3 cups water in pan, cover and bring to a boil for 2 minutes. Turn off heat. Let stand for one hour. Proceed with recipe or keep in refrigerator for two days before cooking or freeze until ready to use.

Lentils and dried beans, also called legumes, play a significant role in treating and preventing obesity, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes. As a good source of fiber, both soluble and insoluble, lentils are believed to help reduce cholesterol and blood triglyceride levels.

Because legumes are vegetables, they do not supply all amino acids necessary to make a complete protein. But that can be easily solved by combining it with food that contains the lacking amino acid methionine. By adding raisins, nuts, seeds, meat, dairy products or eggs, lentil dishes will contain a complete protein with all the amino acids needed.

Lentil-barley soup, lentil-rice salad, or lentil-cheese quiche are complete protein dishes.

Legumes can be an important source of iron, especially for women, whose iron needs are greater. Eating lentils with foods high in Vitamin C, such as tomatoes, green pepper, broccoli, and citrus fruits or juices, helps the body absorb iron more effectively.

Legumes also provide potassium, especially important for people taking medications for heart disease and hypertension. Potassium is also thought to help lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of stroke.

QUICK TO COOK

To cook lentils, rinse and pick over, then simmer on top of the range for 20 minutes or covered in a microwave on high in water (twice the amount of water as lentils) or as the recipe directs.

Drain, if needed, and they're ready to eat.

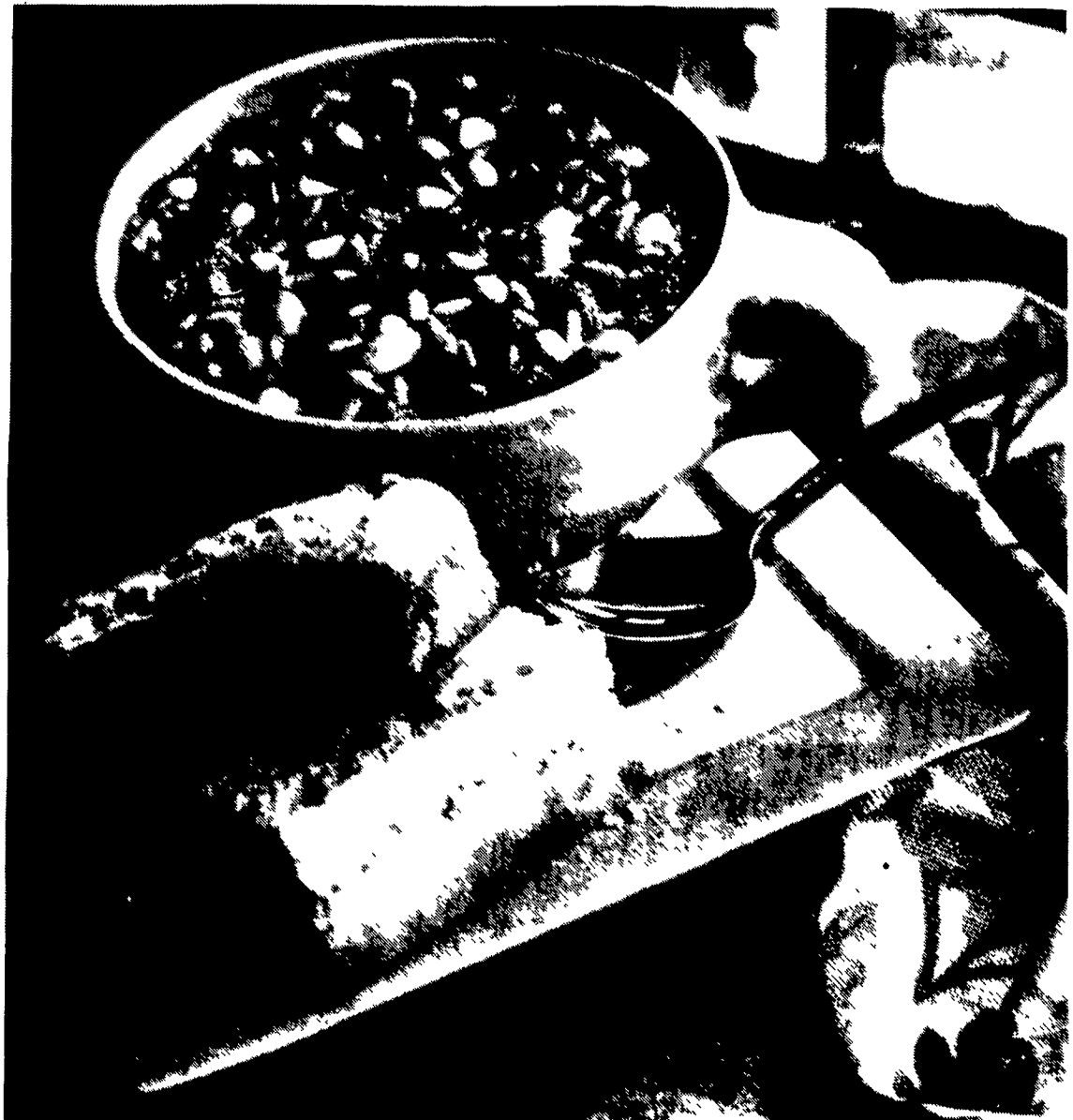
Add seasonings or flavorful ingredients to the cooking water, since lentils absorb flavors well. Do not add acid ingredients such as tomatoes or lemon juice until later, since they will slow cooking. Salt should be added later.

VEGGIE BREAKFAST FRITTATA

2 potatoes, peeled, cubed
Vegetable cooking spray
1 cup onion, thinly sliced
1 cup red bell pepper, thinly sliced
2 cups zucchini, cut into ½ -inch cubes
½ teaspoon dried basil
Salt
Ground pepper
2 ounces garlic and herb Neuf-chatel cheese
4 eggs
4 egg whites
5 to 6 drops hot pepper sauce
2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese, optional

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In medium-sized saucepan, combine potatoes and enough water to cover. Place over medium-high heat and bring to a boil. Cook potatoes 15 minutes or until soft when pierced with a fork. Drain and set aside. Coat 10-inch nonstick oven-proof skillet with cooking spray and place over medium-high heat. Add onion, cook 5 minutes or until soft. Add half the red pepper and all the zucchini, basil, salt and pepper to taste. Cook 5 minutes longer or until zucchini is just soft. Add potatoes; spoon cheese onto vegetable mixture.

In medium-sized bowl, whisk eggs, egg whites, and hot pepper sauce until blended. Pour over vegetables and stir with fork to cover evenly. Make a decorative spokelike pattern on top with reserved red pepper strips; sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Place skillet in oven and bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until knife inserted near center comes out clean. To serve, cut into wedges. Yield 8 servings.



Chunky Vegetarian Chili doesn't need meat to offer complete protein.

SAUSAGE LENTIL SOUP

½ pound bulk Italian sausage
1 large onion, chopped
1 small green pepper, chopped
1 small carrot, chopped
1 large garlic clove, finely minced
1 bay leaf
2 14½ -ounce cans chicken broth
16-ounce can tomatoes with liquid, chopped
1 cup water
½ cup dry lentils
¼ cup mustard

In a Dutch oven, brown and crumble sausage, drain fat. Add next nine ingredients; cover and simmer one hour or until lentils and vegetables are tender. Stir in mustard. Remove bay leaf before serving. Yield: 6 servings.

R. Leinbach

Leola

MINESTRONE SOUP

1 cup dried beans (5 or 6 kinds)
1 quart water
½ teaspoon garlic powder
1 medium onion, chopped
1 tablespoon dried parsley
2-3 beef bouillon cubes
16-ounce can tomatoes
½ cup spaghetti noodles, broken into small pieces
1 medium carrot, diced
½ cup shredded cabbage
½ cup green beans, canned or fresh
1 small zucchini, cubed (optional)
½ teaspoon salt, optional

Combine all ingredients in a large saucepan. Cover and bring to a boil. Cook and simmer 15 to 20 minutes.

Featured Recipe

It seems only fitting that as we near the end of the century, a centuries-old food is setting a new place for itself at the table. Peas and lentils are reappearing in everything from salsas and salads to soups and side dishes. And no wonder. These little legumes not only taste good, they're good for you. Packed with protein, vitamins, and minerals, peas and lentils are high in fiber, low in fat, and cholesterol-free.

Peas and lentils are easy to prepare and easy on the budget too.

For more information and a collection of recipes, send a legal size, self-addressed, stamped envelope to USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council, 5071 Highway 8 West, Moscow, Idaho 83843.

LENTIL VEGGIE QUICHE

This delicious quiche makes its own crust.

1 tablespoon butter
½ cup chopped onion
2 cups chopped fresh broccoli
¼ cup water
1 cup milk
2 eggs, well beaten
½ cup grated Swiss cheese
½ teaspoon salt (optional)
¼ teaspoon black pepper
¼ teaspoon nutmeg
1 cup lentils, rinsed, cooked, drained
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
½ cup dried whole wheat bread crumbs
1 large tomato, chopped

Melt the butter in large skillet. Add the onion and broccoli and cook the vegetables until just tender, stirring often. Add water if needed. In a separate bowl, combine the milk, eggs, Swiss cheese, and all of the seasonings. Add the broccoli, onions, and tender-cooked lentils, and stir.

In a small bowl, mix the Parmesan cheese and bread crumbs and spread half of mixture on the bottom of a 9-inch pie plate. Cover with chopped tomato and pour the broccoli-egg mixture over all. Sprinkle remainder of the Parmesan-crumbs mixture on top. Bake in a 350 degree oven for one hour. Let stand 20 minutes before serving. Cut into wedges. To reheat cold quiche, place in microwave for 30 seconds. Serves 8.

Recipe Topics

If you have recipes for the topics listed below, please share them with us. We welcome your recipes, but ask that you include accurate measurements, a complete list of ingredients and clear instructions with each recipe you submit. Send your recipes to Lou Ann Good, Lancaster Farming, P.O. Box 609, Ephrata, PA 17522. Recipes should reach our office one week before publishing date.

April 1- Recipes Using Nuts
8- Easter Candy
15- Easter Dinner
22- Cooking With Eggs