

Easy Yummy Lentil Soup

For the past five years my husband and I have been addicted to the lentil soup at our local Middle Eastern restaurant. It's rich and creamy without the addition of butter or cream. About six months ago our favorite ME restaurant changed chefs and the soup is not nearly as good as it once was. So I ventured out to make my own version of their old recipe. Lentil soup is a wonderful side dish or main meal as it is full of protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals and high in folate. –And eating lentils or beans two or more times per week may reduce the risk of breast cancer by 34%!

Here is a brief history of lentils; they are indigenous to the near East and Central Asia. The earliest remains of lentils was carbon-dated to 11,000 B.C. and was found in the Franchthi Cave in Greece. Lentil soups were used in traditional medicine to improve digestion and purify blood. Lentils grow in pods that contain one or two seeds. There are many varieties that are classified by their color, black, yellow, green, brown, red and orange. Below are a few types of lentils one can buy:

- Black beluga lentils- small and black, rich with flavor. When you cook them they keep their shape and look like caviar. Black beluga lentils are great as a side dish sautéed with mushrooms but not suitable for the following soup recipe.
- Yellow lentils- hulled black lentils that are popular in South East Asia. In India they are called Chana Dal. They cook up quickly and have a light creamy texture. These are great for soups or side dishes.
- French/Green lentils- whole lentils common in French and Persian cooking. These lentils have a meaty quality and have three times the fiber of red/orange lentils. They take some time to cook and retain their texture. These can be used as a side dish or in soups for a heartier meal.
- Red/Orange lentils- these are the hulled version of the green variety. They cook quickly and have a creamy texture which makes them perfect for soup.

Green and Red/Orange lentils are the most common varieties in the grocery store. So how do they match up to each other?

- Green Lentils (1 oz. dry) has 99 calories, 9 grams of fiber (34% DV), 7 grams of protein, 12% DV Iron and 34% DV Folate.
- Red/Orange lentils (1oz. dry) has 97 calories, 3 grams of fiber (12% DV), 7 grams of protein, 12% DV Iron and 14% DV Folate.

So as you can see in the hulling process we lost quite a bit of fiber and folate. Green lentils are a great food to have around the house if you are pregnant. Folate and Iron are important in a prenatal diet. –and fiber, well if you've been pregnant before than you know.

Lentil Soup Recipe

- 1 tsp. of olive oil enough to coat the pan

- 1 large sweet onion finely chopped
- 3 whole medium carrots diced
- ½ tsp of cumin
- ½ bay leaf
- 1 ½ cups of red/orange sorted and washed
- 48 oz. of low sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- Lemon wedges from 2 lemons
- ½ cup cilantro for garnish
- Pepper to taste

Sauté onions until caramelized. Do not skimp on this part as it imbues the soup with sweetness. Once the onions are caramelized add carrots and sauté for three more minutes. Add lentils and cumin and coat with mixture. Add broth and bay leaf; cook uncovered on a slow simmer until the lentils and carrots are soft. Puree with an immersion blender. Garnish with cilantro and squeezed lemon. Lemon enhances the flavor and cuts down the need for salt. The consistency is meant to be soupy and not too thick.

6 Servings

239 calories, 2 g fat (0 saturated), 0 cholesterol, 450 mg of sodium (depends on the broth you use), 7g Fiber (32% DV), 17g Protein, Iron 28% DV, Vitamin C 27%DV, Vitamin A 107%DV, Calcium 8%DV, Folate 34%DV, B6 23%DV, Thiamin 19%DV. The soup is also high in phosphorus, potassium, copper, manganese and zinc.