

Lentils with Salsa Verde

by Brittany Nickerson, Herbalist, Health Educator and Cook



Fresh herbs and spices commonly used in cooking are highly nutritive and a great addition to your diet. They boast complex flavor profiles that stimulate digestion and metabolism and improve absorption of nutrients. Parsley, for example, contains Vitamins E, A and C, calcium, magnesium, potassium and iron. Parsley is also excellent for promoting kidney and prostate health as well as detoxification.

Garlic is an essential and often overlooked medicinal superfood. It contains sulphur compounds that have been studied extensively for their antimicrobial and immune strengthening benefits. These compounds increase the immune response and help the body fight viral, bacterial and fungal pathogens.

Eating garlic raw provides the best benefit here, so recipes like the salsa verde accompaniment for this lentil soup recipe are the perfect condiment to incorporate into your diet to protect against colds. Garlic is also highly beneficial to the cardiovascular system. It supports elasticity of the blood vessels, thins the blood and helps the body utilize cholesterol. You can enjoy these cardiovascular benefits by eating both raw and cooked garlic.

I like to add raw garlic to my cooking toward the end, allowing enough time for the flavors to soften and mellow, while still maintaining some of the benefits of raw garlic. I don't say this to dissuade you from cooking garlic. I love to roast garlic, stew it and saute it - but I do make sure to get at least some raw garlic into my life, particularly during the winter season!





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Ingredients

For the lentils:

2 cups French lentils, soaked overnight
1 bay leaf
1/4 cinnamon stick
5 cloves

For the salsa verde:

2 packed cups flat leaved Italian parsley (large stems removed), finely chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh oregano (optional)
1/3 cups capers, coarsely chopped

2 garlic cloves, finely minced
the zest of one lemon
fresh ground black pepper
1/2 cup olive oil, approximately

Instructions

Soak the lentils overnight in enough water to cover by 6 inches. In the morning strain the soaking water and cover the lentils with fresh water, by 1 inch. Add bay leaf, cinnamon and cloves. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low and simmer uncovered, stirring every few minutes, until just soft. Don't overcook them or they will get mushy. Set the lentils aside to cool for at least 20 minutes before straining. Straining the lentils while they are hot will make them more likely to separate. If you have the patience you can remove the bay, cinnamon stick and cloves after straining.

While the beans are cooking and or cooling, prepare the ingredients for the salsa verde. Toss together the parsley, capers, garlic, lemon zest and pepper. Then add olive oil, adding more or less to achieve a texture that you like.

Adapt this recipe by adding other finely chopped herbs to the mix, I love to add a few tablespoons of finely chopped thyme or cilantro. Orange zest, in addition to or in place of the lemon, is also lovely. In traditional Italian salsa, verde anchovies are often added. I love this addition! If you add anchovies, cut back a bit on the capers, as both ingredients are salty.

This recipe serves four as a side dish and is delicious either hot or cold. You can serve the lentils over brown rice if you want to beef up the meal a bit or serve it as a side dish. Spoon the sauce over the lentils and enjoy.