



The One Ingredient You're Probably Not Using Enough

It's cold. Even in places that are usually warm, there's that persistent, penetrating chill that makes lighter meals less appealing. This is when lentil dishes really shine.

Lentils are inexpensive, easy to find, naturally low-allergen, and shelf-stable. They don't require soaking, cook relatively quickly, and work across a wide range of meals, from soups and salads to spreads and baked dishes. When you want food that's filling, practical, and easy to work with, lentils are a good bet.

Why lentils are worth including

Lentils are high in fiber, which supports fullness, blood sugar control, and gut health. They also provide plant-based protein, iron, potassium, and folate, along with slow-digesting carbohydrates that contribute to satiety and sustained energy.

They add bulk and structure to meals without much saturated fat or sodium, which is useful when colder weather tends to push meals in a heavier direction.

If lentils have bothered your digestion in the past, start with smaller portions, rinse canned lentils well, or try red lentils, which tend to be easier to digest.

A brief lentil backstory

Lentils are among the oldest cultivated foods, first grown thousands of years ago in the Middle East. They became staples across many regions because they were easy to grow, store, and cook.

Today, lentils show up in Indian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Ethiopian, and European cuisines, each using different varieties and preparations. That long history reflects how well lentils pair with spices, herbs, acids, and fats.

Lentil varieties, simplified

Brown and green lentils hold their shape and work well in soups, salads, and bowls. Red and yellow lentils soften quickly, making them better for soups, dals, purees, and dips. French green (Puy) lentils are firm and slightly peppery, often used in salads and side dishes. Black lentils (beluga) are small and sturdy, holding their shape in composed dishes.

As a rough guide, red lentils cook in about 15–20 minutes, while brown and green lentils take closer to 25–30.

How to choose and store lentils

Dried lentils should be whole, dry, and free of cracks or excess dust. Store them in an airtight container in a cool, dry place, where they'll keep for months.

Lentils are also widely available canned and frozen. Canned lentils are a convenient option for quick meals; look for low-sodium or no-salt-added versions and rinse before using. Frozen lentils work well in soups, stews, and sautés and can go straight from freezer to pan.

Cooked lentils last about five days in the fridge and freeze well, which makes batch cooking easier. Lentils are also used to make lentil flour, a naturally gluten-free option that's increasingly common. Lentil flour is used in products like lentil pasta, crackers, and snack foods, and can also be used in home cooking and baking, often blended with other flours.

Ten ways to use lentils (beyond soup)

1. Blend cooked red lentils into a savory dip with lemon, garlic, olive oil, and spices.
2. Use lentils as the base for veggie burgers, savory loaves, or meatless balls.
3. Add lentils to warm or cold salads with roasted vegetables, herbs, and vinaigrette.
4. Use lentils as the base for a hearty, meatless chili.
5. Mix lentils into grains like farro, barley, or rice along with vegetables for an easy one-pot meal.
6. Stir lentils into pasta sauces or stews for added texture.
7. Mash lentils with mustard, pickles, and herbs for sandwich or wrap fillings.
8. Season lentils for tacos or wraps; they take on spices well.
9. Use lentils in baked desserts like brownies for moisture and structure.
10. Roast or pan-crisp cooked lentils with spices for a crunchy topping on soups and salads.

Basic lentil soup

with global variations



This is a simple, flexible soup that works with a range of flavors.

Ingredients (serves 4-6):

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup dry lentils (brown or green), rinsed
- 4 cups vegetable broth or water
- Salt and black pepper

Instructions:

Heat olive oil in a pot over medium heat. Add onion and carrots and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook for 30 seconds. Stir in lentils and broth, bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Cook until lentils are tender, about 25–30 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Mediterranean-style: Add canned tomatoes or no-sugar-added tomato sauce, oregano, and thyme. Finish with lemon juice and olive oil.

Indian-inspired: Add cumin, turmeric, and garam masala. Red lentils work well here if you prefer a thicker texture. Finish with cilantro.

Italian-style: Add celery with the carrots, plus bay leaf and rosemary. Finish with parsley or a splash of balsamic.

Middle Eastern-inspired: Add cumin and coriander. Finish with lemon juice and olive oil.

North African-inspired: Add smoked paprika, cumin, and a pinch of cinnamon or harissa. Finish with lemon.

Greens-forward: Stir in spinach, kale, or chard at the end until just wilted.

Bonus Recipe! Simple Lentil Brownies

These gems are the perfect way to satisfy your chocolate cravings without all the sugar. These brownies are fudgy, not bean-y, and use common pantry ingredients.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cooked lentils (drained and rinsed if canned)
- ½ cup nut or seed butter
- ⅓ cup maple syrup or sugar
- ¼ cup cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- Optional: chocolate chips

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Blend all ingredients (except chocolate chips) until smooth. Stir in chocolate chips if using. Spread into a lined or greased 8×8 pan. Bake 20–25 minutes, until set but still soft in the center. Cool before slicing.