

Lentils: the forgotten legumes

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(HealthDay)—Lentils may be the least well known members of the legume family.

Like dried peas and beans, these plant-based foods are rich in fiber, protein, minerals and other nutrients with virtually no fat, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. They're filling, inexpensive, available year-round and easy to flavor with spices and other seasonings.

One cup of cooked lentils comes in at about 230 calories. Add some vegetables and you have a satisfying meal for lunch or dinner.

Lentils cook faster than beans because they don't need to be soaked first. But do spread them out on a clean kitchen surface and pick out any small stones. Then place them in a fine mesh strainer and rinse under cold [water](#).

To cook, use three cups of water for every one cup of dry lentils. Bring the water to a boil, add the lentils and, when the water comes back to a boil, turn down the heat to a simmer. Cover and [cook](#) for between 20 and 30 minutes—green lentils typically take longer than red ones. Shorten that time if you'll be adding the lentils to a dish that gets further cooking.

For lentil soups, just add broth, vegetables and herbs. Thicker stews, like the Indian dish called dal, can be made by putting cooked lentils and some of their cooking liquid in a food processor or blender. Cooked cold lentils are a great base for a cold salad and can be pureed to make a dip for raw veggies.

If you've been hesitant to add legumes to your diet because of lengthy or complicated cooking techniques, lentils are a great introduction.

More information: To learn more about lentils, visit the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#).

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