

Lentil Soup with Spinach

This hearty vegetarian soup is easy to make and it can be prepared with either vegetable broth or water.—or substitute up to 1 cup of whey (the liquid remaining after straining yogurt) for an equal amount of the broth or water. Like all legumes, lentils benefit from a little acidity added after cooking. This recipe calls for red wine vinegar, but lemon juice would also fit the bill.

Makes about 1 quart

2 tablespoons **extra-virgin olive oil**, plus more for serving
1 medium **onion**, chopped
1 medium **carrot**, minced
1-1/2 teaspoons kosher **salt**, divided
2 cloves **garlic**, minced
1/2 teaspoon **dried leaf oregano**
1 tablespoon **tomato paste**
1 cup (8 ounces) dried **brown lentils**, picked over for stones, rinsed
1 quart **vegetable broth or water** (see note)
1 **bay leaf**
Freshly ground **black pepper**
About 3 ounces **baby spinach**
1 to 2 teaspoons **red wine vinegar** (see note)
Optional: Freshly grated **Pecorino or Parmesan** cheese, for serving

1. Place a 4-quart saucepan over medium-low heat and add the oil. When the oil is hot, add the onion and carrot, sprinkle with a little of the salt, and sauté, stirring occasionally, until the onions are translucent, 8 to 10 minutes.
2. Add the garlic and oregano and stir for 1 minute.
3. *Pincé* (*pan-SAY*) the tomato paste: Add the paste to the pan and use the back of a spoon to spread it into a thin layer. Cook the tomato paste, stirring occasionally, until it caramelizes, developing a brick red/ruddy brown color, about 5 minutes. This will imbue the soup with rich umami, eclipsing the raw flavor of the tomato paste.
4. Add the lentils, broth, bay leaf, remaining salt, and a few grinds of black pepper. Increase the heat and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, with a lid ajar, stirring occasionally, until the lentils are tender and the soup has thickened, 35 to 40 minutes.
5. A handful at a time, stir in the spinach. Cook, uncovered, just until the spinach has wilted.
6. Remove from the heat and stir in the vinegar. Taste; add more salt and/or pepper, if desired.

7. Serve hot, drizzled with a little olive oil and/or grated cheese, if desired. Cool any leftover soup to room temperature, cover, and refrigerate for up to 5 days.

-Linda Carucci; 2024

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