

Lentil Salad with Salmon

Unlike other dried beans, lentils require no soaking. I recommend using green lentils because they hold their shape after cooking. Brown or red lentils are trickier. They can become soft and mushy in matter of moments. That's fine if you are making soup, but not so great for salads where toothsome texture is important. The best green lentils are from le Puy in France or from the Italian region of Umbria.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups green lentils, rinsed
Water
Salt
1/8 pound diced pancetta
1 1/2 cups diced onions
1/2 cup diced carrots
1/3 cup diced celery
1 teaspoon minced garlic
Freshly ground black pepper
1/4 cup red wine
About 1 cup red wine or sherry vinaigrette (see below)
1 pound salmon fillet
Dry red wine
Chopped fresh mint

DIRECTIONS

Place lentils in a saucepan with water to cover them by two inches. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer gently until tender but not soft. Add 2 teaspoons salt after the lentils have come to a simmer. You want the lentils to be tender but not mushy. Timing will vary according to the age of the beans. They can take 25 to 45 minutes to become tender.

While the lentils cook, heat 4 tablespoons olive oil in a sauté pan or skillet over medium heat. Add the diced pancetta, onion, and carrots and celery, and cook until tender. Add the garlic and red wine and cook a minute or two longer.

Let cool a bit then add to the cooked lentils and toss to combine. Dress the salad with about 1/2 cup dressing while the lentils are still warm. Adjust seasoning. Top with red wine poached salmon and chopped mint.

RED WINE VINAIGRETTE

Yield: about 3/4 cup
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
2/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Basic Vinaigrette Variation (for those who find extra virgin olive too intense:
1/3 cup fruity extra virgin olive oil
2/3 cup pure olive oil
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
2 tablespoons good balsamic vinegar or sherry vinegar
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

When making vinaigrette, always start with vinegar and salt, or vinegar, mustard and salt in the mixing bowl and then whisk in the oil. Add herbs last. Taste and then re-season with salt and pepper. Test by dipping a leaf into the dressing to see about acid and salt balance.

SALMON POACHED IN RED WINE

2 cups dry red wine
4 salmon fillets, each about 4 ounces

Bring 2 cups red wine up to a simmer in a wide shallow pan and poach the salmon slices for about 7 minutes until salmon is just cooked through. It can be a bit rare in the center.

While still warm place salmon fillets atop lentil salad and drizzle with some of the remaining dressing. Sprinkle with mint.

Serves 4 to 6