

Crock Pot Vegetarian Lentil Soup

There used to be this great Greek restaurant that I frequented that served lentil soup in a styrofoam cup. It was always hot and fresh and the lentils were soft without being mushy. I would frame my entire meal around saving room and money for the soup. This recipe mirrors the flavors and warmth of the soup but without a disposable cup. Unlike my vegetarian vegetable soup which is savory and chunky, this lentil soup is hearty and robust with even more amazing health benefits. Lentils are high in protein, iron, amino acids and when you add in the lycopine in the tomatoes and then all the vitamins, folic acid and antioxidants in the spinach... this soup is like a power boost for your whole system. Oh yeah, and it tastes amazing too.

Feel free to serve it in a real bowl and maybe with some crusty bread instead of saltines.

2 cups lentils

8 cups vegetable broth

1 onion, diced

3 stalks celery, diced

2 carrots, chopped

6 oz. fresh spinach, chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 t. salt

1/2 t. pepper

1 t. oregano

1 t. cumin

2 bay leaves

1/4 t. cayenne pepper

1 14 oz. can diced tomatoes

1 T. red wine vinegar

Put everything in the crockpot and cook on low for 8 hours, but add the vegetable broth LAST. Most likely, you won't have room to pour all the liquid in yet. Once the vegetables have all cooked down, then add the rest of the liquid. My 5-qt crock pot is filled to the rim by the time everything is included.

This soup also freezes really well, so save half the pot for a meal another time.

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I love these days that are halfway between winter and spring.

I'm pretty sure by mid-afternoon I'm going to be suffocating in whatever I decided to wear because I was in fear of getting cold when I got dressed in the morning. Yeah, I think it's one of those days. Any day that starts with a gray sky is perfect for a crockpot soup. It means dinner will be fresh and filling, but you didn't have to turn the oven on in the late afternoon and warm up the whole house to 350 degrees.

You can definitely add variety to this soup depending on what vegetables you like. The cabbage adds some sweetness to the soup and depth to the flavor, so if you aren't a huge fan, then cut it down to 1/4 head of cabbage, but I wouldn't remove it completely. If you are a fan of gumbo, try adding some fresh or frozen okra halfway through cooking so it doesn't get too gooey by the end of the day.

If you prefer things with a little intensity, use spicy v8 instead and 1/2 t. of cayenne pepper for the whole pot or top your individual bowl off with a few shakes of Tabasco.

1/2 small head of cabbage, chopped
1/2 sweet onion
2-3 red potatoes, peeled and diced
1 bag frozen mixed vegetables
2 stalks celery, chopped
2 cans petite diced tomatoes, no salt added
1 c. V8 juice
1 c. water
salt, pepper
2-3 bay leaves

Put everything in the crockpot on low for 8-10 hours or on high for 5-6 hours.

Remove bay leaves before serving.