03 - Cooking Lentils

Lentils are the fuel-conservation alternative to whole dried beans. No soaking required, cook in 20 to 30 minutes, and nutritionally comparable to pinto beans. When fuel is limited, use lentils.

Why Lentils Are Different

Whole dried beans like pintos require soaking and 60 to 90 minutes of cooking. Lentils require neither soaking nor long cooking times. This makes them the right choice when:

- Fuel supply is running low
- You need food ready quickly
- You forgot to soak beans the night before
- You are cooking for someone who is sick and needs something easy to digest

Red lentils cook the fastest at 20 to 25 minutes and break down into a soft almost porridge-like texture. Green or brown lentils hold their shape better and take 25 to 35 minutes.

What You Need

- Dried lentils (red, green, or brown)
- Water
- A pot with a lid
- Salt
- Heat source

Water Requirements

Amount Dry	Water	Yield Cooked	Cook Time
1/2 cup red lentils	1.5 cups	~1.5 cups	20–25 min
1/2 cup green/brown lentils	1.75 cups	~1.5 cups	25–35 min

Amount Dry	Water	Yield Cooked	Cook Time
1 cup red lentils	3 cups	~3 cups	20–25 min
1 cup green/brown lentils	3.5 cups	~3 cups	25–35 min

> **Note:** Red lentils absorb water very readily. Check at 15 minutes and add a small splash of water if the pot looks dry before they are fully soft.

How to Cook

1. Sort through lentils quickly and remove any small stones or debris — this takes about 30 seconds and matters
2. Rinse once in cold water if water supply allows
3. Add lentils and water to pot
4. Bring to a boil
5. Reduce to a steady simmer
6. Cover with a lid
7. Cook until completely soft — 20 to 25 minutes for red, 25 to 35 for green or brown
8. Salt to taste at the end

There is no soaking step. That is the whole point.

Adding Fat

Same as with beans — stir in one tablespoon of tallow or other cooking fat per person during the last 5 minutes of cooking, or pour heated fat over the finished lentils when serving. Fat significantly improves flavor and provides the dietary fat your body needs that lentils do not supply on their own.

[ADD-INS]

Lentils absorb surrounding flavors very well, which makes them one of the more adaptable bases in this plan.

Add at the start with the water:

- Garlic, crushed or minced — transforms the flavor completely
- Cumin, a pinch — pairs exceptionally well with lentils
- Turmeric, a pinch — mild flavor, significant anti-inflammatory value
- Dried chili or hot pepper
- Chopped tomato — cook it right in with the lentils

Add in the last 5 minutes:

- Green onion tops
- Fresh or dried herbs — thyme, oregano, bay leaf
- Any chopped root vegetable that is already cooked or very small cut

Stir in after cooking:

- Fresh kale, chard, or spinach — wilts in 1 to 2 minutes from residual heat
- Fresh green onion or garlic greens from the garden
- A small squeeze of lemon or lime if available — dramatically brightens red lentils

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Red Lentil Dal — Simple Variation

If you have garlic and any spice at all, red lentils can become something that feels like an actual dish rather than a survival meal.

1. Heat a tablespoon of tallow in the pot
2. Add 2 to 3 crushed garlic cloves and cook 1 minute until fragrant
3. Add lentils and water
4. Add a pinch of cumin and a pinch of chili if available
5. Cook as normal
6. Finish with any available greens stirred in at the end

The result is a simple dal — a dish eaten across South Asia for thousands of years on exactly these ingredients. It is filling, complete protein with rice, and tastes like intentional cooking rather than rationing.

Fuel Comparison vs Whole Beans

Item	Soak Time	Active Cook Time	Total Time

Pinto / black beans	8–12 hours	60–90 min	~10 hours
Green / brown lentils	None	25–35 min	35 min
Red lentils	None	20–25 min	25 min

On a propane camp stove running at medium-low, the difference between cooking pintos and red lentils is roughly 45 to 60 minutes of burn time per meal. Over two weeks for a family of 4 that adds up to a significant amount of fuel saved.

Batch Cooking Reference

Dry Lentils	Feeds (per meal)	Cook Time
1 cup	2 people	20–35 min
2 cups	4 people	20–35 min
3 cups	6 people	25–35 min

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Revision #1
Created 2026-05-01 04:50:44 UTC by Danicus
Updated 2026-05-01 04:50:55 UTC by Danicus