



Savoury, meaty lentils

have lost their reputation as cheap hippy food, a reputation they never had in old cuisines. Since antiquity lentils have been regarded by many cultures as a valuable and delicious

addition to any meal. In Italy they're associated with good luck because they look like tiny coins.

According to food guru Harold McGee, there are two sorts: large flat ones and small rounded ones. We're familiar with the small green or brown Continental lentils, and the bright orangey-red peeled split ones used in Indian cooking.

Pick them over to make sure there are no stones or grit in them and, as with all pulses, don't add salt until they're tender or they will remain tough. Also, check to be sure they haven't been heat treated as this toughens them as well.

Roasted Spiced Chicken Drumsticks with Una's Lemon Dahl

I call this Una's Lemon Dahl because it was my young friend Una who made it for a dinner I was at recently. She got the recipe from someone else and kindly passed it on to me. Great to see kids who know how to cook!

The dahl is subtle and delicate and great with the following chicken drumsticks, steamed rice and a raita made from grated squeezed cucumber, plain unsweetened yoghurt, chopped mint and salt to taste.

Japanese soy sauce and Italian tomato passata in an Indian-flavoured dahl? Don't knock it till you try it!

12 free-range chicken drumsticks (about 1.5kg)

4Tbsp peanut oil

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

3Tbsp finely chopped ginger

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1 tsp ground turmeric

1 big pinch chilli flakes

coriander leaves for serving

■ Preheat the oven to 200°C. Arrange the drumsticks side by side in a large roasting dish. Add all the other ingredients except the coriander, mix well and then place in the oven. Roast for 30 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through and well browned.

Remove from the oven, sprinkle with coriander and serve with the dahl.

UNA'S LEMON DAHL

3Tbsp grapeseed oil

1 onion, finely chopped

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

½ tsp cumin seeds

2 tsp yellow or black mustard seeds

1 tsp mild curry powder

1 tsp ground turmeric

½ tsp ground cumin

1 whole lemon, pips removed, very finely chopped. Save any juice that comes out of it

2 cups orange split lentils, well washed

1Tbsp Japanese soy sauce

1/2 cup tomato passata

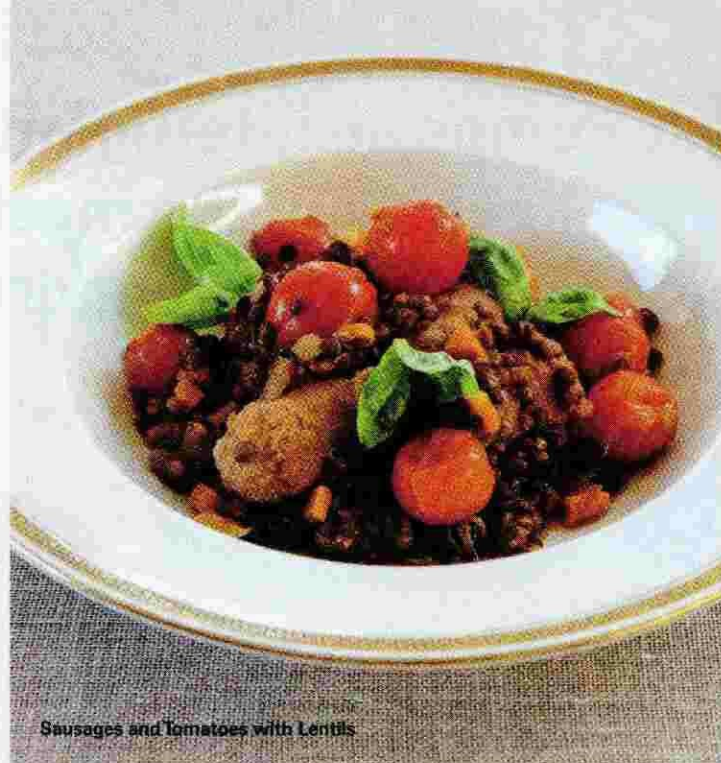
salt to taste

■ Put the oil in a heavy saucepan over moderate heat. Add the onion and fry gently for about 5 minutes until almost soft. Add the garlic and cumin seeds and fry for 1 minute. Add the mustard seeds and when they start to pop and the onions are just beginning to brown, add the curry powder, turmeric and ground cumin, and mix well.

Add the lemon, juice, lentils, soy sauce and enough water to cover the lentil mixture by 5cm. Bring to the boil and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 20 minutes until the mixture is like thin porridge. Stir in the tomato passata and simmer for a further 10 minutes. It will have thickened a bit more. Taste and season with salt. Serves 6.

Sausages and Tomatoes with Lentils

The best French lentils are Puy lentils, Puy being the place they come from. Italy also produces excellent brown



Sausages and Tomatoes with Lentils

and green lentils – my favourite brand is Montebello. Any brown or green lentils will be fine for this.

1¼ cups green or brown lentils, well washed

2 carrots

2 sticks celery

2 onions

1 bay leaf

3Tbsp extra virgin olive oil

6 large pure pork sausages, cut into 3cm slices (don't worry if they get a bit squashed)

pinch chilli flakes

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

100ml white wine

400g can Italian cherry tomatoes in juice

salt and freshly ground black pepper basil leaves or chopped parsley for serving

■ Place the lentils in a large saucepan and add: 1 carrot, quartered lengthways; 1 stick celery, halved; 1 onion, quartered; and the bay leaf. Add enough water to cover the ingredients by 10cm, then bring to the boil and simmer for 15-20 minutes or until the lentils are tender but not collapsing to a mush.

Take off the heat, strain, discard the vegetables and place the lentils in a heatproof bowl. Add 2 tablespoons of the oil and mix well. Reserve.

Peel and finely dice the remaining carrot, thinly slice the remaining celery

and finely chop the remaining onion

Heat the remaining oil over moderate heat and add the sausage. Fry until well browned, then add chilli flakes, carrot, celery, onion and garlic. Cover and braise gently for about 10 minutes until the onion and carrot are soft.

Uncover, turn up the heat, add wine and let it bubble for 20 seconds. Scrape the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to dislodge any caramelised meat juices.

Add the tomatoes and reserved lentils. Mix well, but don't break up the tomatoes. Simmer for 5 minutes until hot. Taste and season. Serve sprinkled with ripped up basil leaves or chopped parsley. Serves 6.

Ray McVinnie is Cuisine's food editor



Sandhurst Waipara Pinot Noir 2007

★★★★★ \$29-\$35

Lentils and pinot are one of those excellent but unheralded combos. This wine's masculinity will buddy up nicely with the lentils' earthiness. It's a very fine pinot all round.

JOHN SAKER

