

Why the Fuss About Legumes?

by John Rizzo

Unless you live under a rock, you have been hearing over and over about the nutritional benefits of legumes. Although the list is extensive; I will limit the discussion to a couple attributes that are reason enough to include legumes in your diet. Simply defined as a dried bean or fruit that grows in a pod, legumes are an excellent source of dietary fiber, both soluble and insoluble. Studies confirm that eating foods high in fiber can help lower cholesterol levels and ultimately prevent heart disease. It's not just the fiber from consuming legumes that benefits the heart; folate and magnesium are essential nutrients that help maintain healthy artery walls in the bloodstream. Lastly, research published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* has shown that a steady diet of legumes can actually lower blood pressure.

Additional to the heart healthy benefits gained by eating legumes, these fibrous beans and fruits can assist in stabilizing blood sugar levels, while providing energy to burn. Anyone suffering from diabetes or hypoglycemia could benefit greatly by adding legumes to their daily diet. Possessing a low glycemic index, they balance your digestion by slowing down the process and consequently lowering sugar levels entering the blood stream after your meal.

If you are looking for easy ways to incorporate legumes in your diet; consider the lentil. They are small, have a moderate flavor, cook quickly, and can be added to a number of recipes or foods without negatively affecting the outcome. Add them to vegetable soup, salads, over a baked potato, stews, pasta dishes, rice; the list goes on. One last thing to remember is that lentils are high in protein, which helps you feel fuller faster. So if calorie intake is a concern, adding lentils will not only keep your body healthy, but can aid in weight loss as well.

Rice and Lentil Pilaf

6 servings

Boneless skinless chicken breasts	12 oz.	Chicken Stock	6 Cups
		Lentils	1 Cup
Hot Sausage, Crumbles	8 oz.	Rice	1 1/2 Cups
Onions, Diced	1 Cup	Kale, Chopped	4 Cups
Celery, Diced	2 Cups	Paprika	2 TBL
Green Pepper, Diced	1 Cup	Liquid Smoke	1/2 tsp.

Slice the chicken into 1/4 inch strips, set aside. Brown the sausage in a large heavy skillet or saucepan that can hold at least 3 quarts of ingredients. Let all the water cook out of the sausage and remove from heat and drain well. Add the chicken to the skillet and brown it; remove from pan. Using the same skillet, brown the onions while scraping any bits of meat from the bottom of the pan. Add the celery and green pepper. Cook on medium heat until the vegetables begin to soften; remove from heat and set aside.

Meanwhile, in a separate saucepan, bring the chicken stock and lentils to a boil; let simmer for 15 minutes. Add the chicken, sausage, lentils, and chicken stock to the cooked vegetables and bring to a light boil; turn down the heat and let simmer.

Heat a small amount of oil in a medium skillet and add the raw rice; cook the rice until it begins to turn a light shade of brown –about 5 minutes. Add it to the lentil mixture and stir well.

Add the kale, paprika and the liquid smoke and continue to cook the mixture until the rice is tender and most of the liquid is absorbed.