

# Lentil Soup with Leeks and Mushrooms

## Ingredients:

3 cups cooked green or brown lentils, divided (see note).  
½ Onion, diced;  
1 Leek, root and top inch cut off, *rinsed well*, chopped;  
4 medium carrots, chopped;  
4 cloves garlic, chopped;  
2 cups mushrooms, chopped;  
1 cup chopped tomatoes. Use canned chopped tomatoes if you prefer;  
3 cups low sodium vegetable broth, divided;  
2 bay leaves;  
¼ cup walnuts;  
¼ cup nutritional yeast;  
¼ cup sun-dried tomatoes;  
1 Tablespoon red wine vinegar

## Instructions:

Heat a soup pot over medium heat. When pot is hot, add three tablespoons water (more if needed) and the onion, leek, carrots, celery and garlic. Cover pot and cook until vegetables are tender, stirring frequently and adding additional water if needed. Add mushrooms and cook until they release water. Add the chopped tomatoes, 2 cups of the cooked lentils, 2 cups of the vegetable broth and the bay leaves and bring to a simmer.

Meanwhile, **blend** the remaining cup of cooked lentils, the remaining cup of vegetable broth, the walnuts, nutritional yeast and sun-dried tomatoes until smooth. Add blended mixture to soup pot.

Continue cooking soup at a low simmer for ten minutes. Stir in vinegar.

Additional vegetable broth can be added for a thinner soup.

**NOTE:** To cook lentils, rinse 1 ¼ cups lentils and place in a pot with 2 ½ cups of water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, cover and simmer until soft but not mushy, about 20 minutes. Strain any excess liquid. Can make the lentils the day before or earlier in the day. This soup is amazing – one of my favorites!

# Leeks: Onion's Sweet Cousin, Same Benefits

## **Fun Folklore:**

Leeks have been cultivated for thousands of years. They're even mentioned in the Bible. The Emperor, Nero ate them in great quantity, believing they improved his singing voice, earning him the nickname, Porophagus ("leek eater").

## **Looks and Likes:**

The lowly leek looks like a scallion on steroids. Indeed, it is in the same family, along with garlic, onions and shallots. However, its flavor is more subtle than any of its cousins. As a member of the Allium family, leeks contain the same healthful sulfur compounds found in garlic and onions, but in smaller amounts; you'll need to eat more of leeks to reap the same benefits. Leeks also bring benefits like manganese, vitamin C, folate, vitamin B6 and Iron.

If eaten regularly, leeks provide the same health benefits—cholesterol-lowering and cancer-protection—attributed to other members of the family. Allium veggies also have been shown to lower high blood pressure and hinder plaque development in blood vessels. Leeks are a rich source of the flavonoid kaempferol (also found in blueberries, broccoli, kale and tea). The Nurse's Health Study found that women whose diets contained the most kaempferol were 40% less likely to develop ovarian cancer as women who ate the least kaempferol. Eating Allium vegetables just a couple of times a week has been linked to a reduced risk of colon cancer.

## **Delectable Details:**

Leeks peak in early spring, though are generally available year-round in stores. Choose leeks no bigger than 1 ½ inches in diameter—the smaller, the more tender and sweet. The green tops should be crisp and the bottoms white and fairly clean. Wash leeks well, as dirt can get trapped between the layers. Cut off any roots and then cut leeks in half lengthwise; hold the cut ends under cool running water or swish in water.

For most cooking, use only the white and palest green parts of the leeks; the dark green part can be tough, though edible if thinly sliced and added to soups. Leeks can be eaten raw in salads or used to garnish other foods, as you would with scallions or chives.

Try braising, baking, sauteing or stir-frying leeks; when cooked longer or at higher temperatures, the sugars caramelize a bit, giving them wonderful flavor and a rustic browned appearance.