Prep Time: 15 minutes | Cook Time: 40 minutes | Total Time: 55 minutes
Yield: 6–8 servings (about 3 quarts) | Intensity Level: Easy

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Introduction

Hearty Mediterranean Lentil Soup is a bowl of sunshine on a cold day — earthy brown lentils simmered with sweet tomatoes, fragrant cumin and coriander, bright lemon, and a generous handful of leafy greens, all finished with good olive oil. It’s a staple across the Mediterranean, from Greek *fakes* to Middle Eastern *shorbat adas*, and for good reason: it’s nourishing,

budget-friendly, and deeply satisfying without being heavy. Lentils bring plant-based protein and fiber, while the vegetables and aromatics build layers of flavor, and the lemon at the end ties everything together with a bright, fresh finish. The soup is naturally vegan and gluten-free (check your broth), comes together in under an hour, and actually improves the next day. It’s perfect for meal prep, freezer-friendly, and adaptable to whatever vegetables you have on hand. Serve it with warm flatbread for a complete, wholesome meal that feels both comforting and energizing.

Ingredients

For the Soup

- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, diced (about 1½ cups)
- 3 medium carrots, peeled and diced (about 1 cup)
- 3 celery stalks, diced (about 1 cup)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1½ tsp ground cumin

- 1 tsp ground coriander
- ½ tsp smoked paprika
- ¼ tsp ground cinnamon (optional, for depth)
- ¼ tsp red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1½ cups (300 g) dried brown or green lentils, rinsed and picked over
- 1 can (14.5 oz / 410 g) diced tomatoes, with juices
- 7 cups (1.65 L) low-sodium vegetable broth (or chicken broth)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp kosher salt (plus more to taste)
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 2 cups (60 g) fresh baby spinach or chopped kale
- 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice (about 1 lemon), plus wedges for serving
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley

- 2 tbsp chopped fresh cilantro or dill (optional)

For Serving

- Extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling
- Warm flatbread or pita
- Lemon wedges
- Crumbled feta (optional)

Equipment

- Large Dutch oven or heavy 6-quart pot
- Wooden spoon
- Chef’s knife and cutting board
- Ladle
- Colander (for rinsing lentils)

Time & Intensity Breakdown

Stage	Time	Intensity	What's Happening
Prep vegetables	10 min	Low–Moderate	Dice onion, carrot, celery; mince garlic
Rinse lentils	3 min	Low	Pick over and rinse until water runs clear
Sauté aromatics	6–8 min	Moderate	Soften vegetables in olive oil
Bloom spices	2 min	Moderate	Toast cumin, coriander, paprika, tomato paste
Simmer the soup	30 min	Low (passive)	Lentils soften; flavors meld
Add greens & finish	4 min	Low	Wilt spinach; brighten with lemon
Rest & serve	3 min	Low (passive)	Flavors settle; adjust seasoning

Total active time: ~25 minutes | Total passive time: ~30 minutes

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Instructions

Step 1: Prep the Vegetables (10 minutes | Low–Moderate Intensity)

Dice the onion, carrots, and celery into roughly uniform ½-inch pieces so they cook evenly. Mince the garlic. Rinse the lentils in a colander under cold water, picking through them for any small stones or debris — lentils are usually clean, but a quick check is worth it. Set everything within reach of the stove.

Step 2: Sauté the Aromatics (6–8 minutes | Moderate Intensity)

Heat the olive oil in a large Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add the diced onion, carrots, and celery and cook, stirring occasionally, for 6–7 minutes, until softened and

the onion is translucent. Add the minced garlic and cook 30 seconds, until fragrant — don’t let it brown.

Step 3: Bloom the Spices (2 minutes | Moderate Intensity)

Add the tomato paste, cumin, coriander, smoked paprika, cinnamon (if using), and red pepper flakes to the pot. Stir constantly for 1–2 minutes, until the tomato paste darkens slightly and the spices are fragrant. This step blooms the spices in the oil and is where the soup’s warm, complex flavor begins.

Step 4: Simmer the Soup (30 minutes | Low Intensity, Passive)

Add the rinsed lentils, diced tomatoes with juices, vegetable broth, bay leaf, salt, and pepper. Stir to combine and bring to a gentle boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 25–30 minutes, until the lentils are tender but not mushy and the broth has thickened slightly. Stir occasionally and skim any foam from the surface.

Step 5: Add the Greens and Finish (4 minutes | Low Intensity)

Remove the bay leaf. Stir in the baby spinach or kale and cook for 2–3 minutes, until wilted and bright green. Stir in the fresh lemon juice, parsley, and cilantro or dill (if using). Taste and adjust the salt, pepper, and lemon — the soup should taste bright and lively, not flat.

Step 6: Rest and Serve (3 minutes | Low Intensity, Passive)

Let the soup rest off the heat for 3–5 minutes to let the flavors settle. Ladle into bowls, drizzle generously with extra-virgin olive oil, and serve with warm flatbread, lemon wedges, and crumbled feta if desired.

Flavor Variations

- Greek-Style (*Fakes*): Add 1 tbsp red wine vinegar instead of lemon and serve with crumbled feta.
- Moroccan: Add ½ tsp ground ginger, a pinch of saffron, and a handful of chopped dried apricots.
- Spinach & Orzo: Add ½ cup orzo in the last 10 minutes of cooking for a heartier soup.
- Spicy Harissa: Stir in 1–2 tsp harissa paste with the spices for a smoky kick.
- Coconut Lentil: Swap 2 cups of the broth for coconut milk and add a squeeze of lime.

Serving Suggestions

Serve with warm pita or flatbread, a drizzle of good olive oil, and lemon wedges. It’s also lovely alongside a simple cucumber-tomato salad or a scoop of hummus. For a heartier meal, add a poached egg on top or serve over rice.

Storage & Reheating

- Refrigerator: Store cooled soup in an airtight container for up to 5 days; flavors deepen overnight.
- Freezer: Freeze in portioned containers for up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in the fridge.
- Reheating: Warm gently on the stovetop over medium-low heat, adding broth or water if the soup has thickened too much (lentils absorb liquid as they sit).
- Note: The soup thickens considerably when chilled; thin with a splash of broth when reheating.

Nutrition Information (Per Serving, Based on 8 Servings)

Values are estimates and will vary by broth brand, lentil type, and exact vegetable amounts.

Nutrient	Amount per Serving
Calories	~235 kcal
Total Fat	~5 g
— Saturated Fat	~0.8 g
Cholesterol	0 mg
Sodium	~420 mg
Total Carbohydrates	~35 g
— Fiber	~12 g
— Sugars	~6 g
Protein	~13 g