

Lentil and Ground Meat base (for Tacos, Rice or Noodles)



Lentils, those little round dried, items that are often used for soup, can be used to stretch ground meats in recipes. They are very mild in flavor, and absorb the flavors of other ingredients. High in protein, they are also very nutritious. They come in brown, green and red or pink varieties.

A package of brown lentils, 16 ounces is under \$2.00. 1 cup of dried lentils cooked, produces double its volume and weight. So one bag cooked will equal 2 pounds of ground meat. Here is how you can use lentils to Stretch expensive ground meat.

To cook lentils: rinse 1 cup packaged, dry lentils in water. Look for any pebbles or loose skins and discard them.

- Place the rinsed lentils in a saucepan, cover with water, 2 inches above the top of the lentils. Bring to a boil.
- Reduce heat and simmer until soft about 20 minutes. Drain the water and set lentils aside.

Ingredients for Lentil and ground beef base

- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons oil
- Small can mushrooms finely chopped (optional)
- 2 cups cooked and drained lentils (green, brown or red)
- 1 teaspoon mustard
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Hot sauce (optional)
- 1 pound Ground Beef (Italian Sausage ground, can be substituted)
- 2 cups cooked lentils (Cook Lentils as directed above)

Directions

- In a large skillet, warm the oil over medium heat, add onion and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, until soft. Add canned mushrooms, cook until the mushrooms excess moisture has evaporated. Set aside.
- Lentils can be used whole or mashed. If mashed they will mix more easily with the ground meat. Transfer the mashed lentils to a large bowl along with cooked vegetables and all remaining ingredients including ground beef (or sausage).
- Brown the entire mix in a skillet. Once mix is browned, taste test and add salt & pepper, to taste. The fully cooked mixture can be divided into two or three portions and frozen for future meals. Here are three recipes for using this fully cooked mixture.

Beef and Lentil Burritos Recipe (Or Nachos, or Mexican Rice or Mexican Noodles)

Ingredients – Taco, Burrito filling

- 1 ½ cup of cooked and seasoned beef and lentil mix (about 1/3 of the total mixture)
- 1 can pinto beans - drained
- ½ cup tomato sauce
- ½ package of Taco seasoning

Combine the meat and lentil mix, add the beans and taco seasoning and heat thoroughly. Taste and add additional seasoning as needed.

Spoon the heated mix into soft or hard shell tacos/burrito shells. If you have grated cheese or salsa add to taste.

OTHER OPTIONS

- **Chips and Crackers:** top French fries, taco chips or even saltine crackers with the fully cooked, Taco / Burrito filling. Children love foods they can eat with their fingers. Cheese or salsa can be added if you desire.
- **Rice:** Mix 2 cups of the lentil and beef base into 2 cups cooked rice. Add 1 or more cups diced canned tomatoes (the variety canned with basil and garlic is good) OR add 2 cups of any commercial spaghetti sauce. Bake for 20 to 30 minutes. The casserole can be topped with a mix of bread crumbs, or cracker crumbs. Mozzarella cheese is also good as a topping.
- **Noodles:** If using noodles, cook the noodles as directed on the package. Substitute noodles for the rice, and use the instructions for the Rice casserole above. Add cracker crumbs and grated cheese if desired

COOKING RICE

Rice is very easy to cook as long as you have Long or Medium standard rice (brown or white). Arborio rice is a special rice that requires long cooking times, so avoid that variety for these recipes.

- 1 cup of rice
- 2 cups of water
- 1 teaspoon salt

Use saucepan where rice can be fully covered with water. Add rice to water, bring to a boil. Cover the saucepan. **Turn off the heat**, and allow it to sit covered and undisturbed for 15 minutes.

