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Lentil Salad

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: The key to making a lentil salad is perfecting the cooking of the lentils so they maintain their shape and firm-tender bite. There are two important steps to achieve this. The first is to brine the lentils in warm salt water. With brining, the lentils' skins soften, which leads to fewer blow-outs. The second step is to cook the lentils in the oven, which heats them gently and uniformly. Once we had perfectly cooked lentils, all we had left to do was pair the earthy beans with a tart vinaigrette and boldly flavored mix-ins.

Lentil Salad with Olives, Mint, and Feta

Serves 4 to 6

French green lentils, or *lentilles du Puy*, are our preferred choice for this recipe, but it works with any type of lentil except red or yellow. Brining helps keep the lentils intact, but if you don't have time, they'll still taste good. The salad can be served warm or at room temperature.

- 1 cup lentils, picked over and rinsed**
- Salt and pepper**
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth**
- 5 garlic cloves, lightly crushed and peeled**
- 1 bay leaf**
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons white wine vinegar**
- ½ cup coarsely chopped pitted kalamata olives**
- ½ cup fresh mint leaves, chopped**
- 1 large shallot, minced**
- 1 ounce feta cheese, crumbled (¼ cup)**

1. Place lentils and 1 teaspoon salt in bowl. Cover with 4 cups warm water (about 110 degrees) and soak for 1 hour. Drain well. (Drained lentils can be refrigerated for up to 2 days before cooking.)

2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Place drained lentils, 2 cups water, broth, garlic, bay leaf, and ½ teaspoon salt in medium saucepan. Cover and bake until lentils are tender but remain intact, 40 to 60 minutes. Meanwhile, whisk oil and vinegar together in large bowl.

3. Drain lentils well; remove garlic and bay leaf. Add drained lentils, olives, mint, and shallot to dressing and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to serving dish, sprinkle with feta, and serve.