

French Lentil Salad with Caramelized Balsamic Vinaigrette

From Vegetarian Planet

2 C dried French lentils (or brown lentils)
5 C water
¼ C currants
5 T Caramelized Balsamic Vinaigrette (recipe below)
1 large ripe tomato or 3 plum tomatoes cut into 1/2" cubes
2 T minced shallots
¼ C chopped walnuts, lightly toasted
½ t salt
Fresh-ground black pepper to taste
¼ C basil leaves, sliced thin (optional)

Put the lentils into a saucepan and cover them with the water. Bring to a boil, and then turn down the heat. Simmer for 20 minutes, uncovered, adding more water if necessary to prevent scorching. When the lentils are tender but slightly chewy, add the currants, and simmer 2 minutes more

Drain the lentil-currant mixture well, and transfer to a bowl. While the mixture is still hot, add the Caramelized Balsamic Vinaigrette. Stir well. Add the tomato pieces, shallots, walnuts, salt, and pepper to the lentils. Stir well. Serve the salad warm or chill it. Sprinkle on the basil leaves just before serving.

This salad keeps well for 2 days, covered, in the refrigerator.

Caramelized Balsamic Vinaigrette

1 C sugar
6 T water
5 T balsamic vinegar
1 C olive oil
3 garlic cloves
1 t salt
Fresh ground black pepper to taste

Combine the sugar and 4 T of water in a heavy saucepan that can hold at least 2 qts of liquid. Bring the mixture to a boil, and continue to boil it until it turns a light golden color. Once it turns this color, immediately take the pan off the heat. While beating it with a whisk, slowly pour in the balsamic vinegar, keeping your body and face as far from the pot as possible in case the caramel sputters. If you see little sugar balls in the syrup, some of the sugar has crystallized; if this happens, put the pan back on the heat and stir until the sugar balls dissolve (remove any that don't).

Off the heat, whisking constantly, slowly add the olive oil, in a stream the width of a pencil. Then whisk in the remaining 2 T water. (It may appear incompletely emulsified at first, but by the time you're done adding all of the water, the dressing should be emulsified.) Add the garlic pepper, and salt.

The vinegar is now ready to use. If you need to store it, chill it in a covered container until you need it, then heat it slowly in a pan over low heat until it thins. This will keep in the fridge for at least 2 weeks. (Or try it chilled over goat cheese, apples, or pear slices.)