**Lentils**

1. **What are Lentils?**
   1. Lentils are a type of bean in the legume family. They grow on low bushes. They grow well with very little water. The lentils themselves are actually the seeds of the plant. They grow in pods that contain either one or two lentil seeds that are round or oval lens-shaped disks.
   2. They are harvested when the bush leaves become yellow. The whole bush is pulled and allowed to dry. The pods and seeds are removed and they continue to dry. Lentils are ready for dry storage when dried adequately. If not dried properly, moisture could produce mold.
   3. Lentils come in three main varieties: brown, green and red. Most grocery stores carry brown lentils, usually dried. Green and red lentils may be found at specialty food stores.
   4. The top lentil producers in the world are Canada, Turkey, Australia, India and the US. 1/3 of US produced lentils are grown in the Palouse Region which is located in the states of Washington, Idaho and Oregon, and they are used as a rotation crop with wheat.
2. **History of Lentil**
   1. Lentils are one of the first crops to be domesticated and have been in the human diet for more than 10,000 years, native from West Asia.
   2. Lentils are consumed throughout the world as a main staple in the diet.
   3. Lentils were traded around the world. They have been grown in the US since the early 1900’s.
3. **Health Benefits**
   1. Lentils, like the other dried beans, are a good source of protein and can replace meats in stews, soups or as a side.
   2. They are an excellent source of dietary fiber, which brings a lot of healthy benefits. For example, it can help lower cholesterol, prevents constipation, and aids in digestion.
   3. Lentils are also packed with folic acid, phosphorus, and potassium. One cup of cooked lentils provides 90% of daily folic acid needs. Lentils provide more folic acid than any other unfortified food.
   4. Lentils are a good source of iron. The body uses iron to produce red blood cells. People who are deficient in iron may develop anemia. The iron in lentils is not absorbed as easily as the iron in meat, but can be increased by eating the legumes with meat or with a rich source of vitamin C, like vegetables.
4. **Selection, Storage, and Preparation**
   1. Lentils work well in soups, stews and salads. They also work well as a main or side dish — boil them for 15 to 30 minutes, add turmeric, ginger or other seasonings, and serve over rice or mix with other vegetables.
   2. Selection: Lentils are only available dried. They are not used fresh. Select lentils that are dry and firm. Againm there are 3 colors to choose from:

* **Brown lentils-**The least expensive, they soften when cooked and can become mushy. It retains its shape when done. Use for soups.
* **Green lentils**- Also called French lentils, these have a nuttier flavor and stay firm when cooked. Green lentils are the best choice for salads. Cook them and then cool them and serve cold on salad.
* **Red lentils**-The fastest cooking, these lose their shape and turn golden when cooked. They taste milder and sweeter than green lentils. Use them for purees.
  1. Storage: Dried lentils have an indefinite shelf-life. With age, the color may fade a bit, but the flavor will not noticeably deteriorate. Store lentils in a sealed package or airtight container in a cool, dry place. For best flavor and presentation, use dried lentils within one year. Cooked lentils may be refrigerated up to one week in a sealed container. Cooked lentils may also be frozen up to six months. However, they may fall apart when reheated.
  2. Preparation: **Unlike other legumes, lentils cook quickly without pre-soaking.** Just make sure to rinse away any dirt or debris before adding them to recipes. Cover with water or broth and boil for 2 to 3 minutes (to aid in digestion). Reduce heat and simmer until tender, about 15-30 minutes.

1. **Fun Facts:** 
   1. The word *lentils* comes from the Latin *lens,* because of the lentil-shaped seeds.
   2. Lentils have been found in the tombs of Egypt dating back to 2400 B.C.
   3. There is even a National Lentil Festival in Pullman Washington started in 1989 every year.