Lentil and Spinach Pasta Bake

One 9×13 in (23×33 cm) baking dish, at least 3.5 qt/3.3 L; 6 meatless main-dish portions · Active 30 min · Total 1 hr 20 min

Ingredients

- 9 oz dry penne pasta (250 g)
- 12 cups water (2.8 L), for pasta
- 10 1/2 oz frozen chopped spinach (300 g)
- 1/4 cup water (60 ml), for spinach, or packet requirement
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (15 ml)
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped (150 g)
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped (6 g)
- 1 can crushed tomatoes with juice (14 oz/400 g)
- 1 cup tomato passata (250 ml)
- 1/2 cup water (120 ml), for sauce
- 2 cans brown or green lentils, drained and rinsed (1 lb 1 oz/480 g drained total)
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon fine salt (1.5 g)
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 5 oz low-moisture mozzarella, grated (140 g)

Set out

Oven, 9×13 in (23×33 cm) baking dish, at least 3.5 qt/3.3 L, Large pasta saucepan, at least 5 qt/4.7 L, Small covered saucepan for spinach, Large deep skillet, Sieve, Clean towel, Rimmed baking sheet, Food thermometer, Suitable foil if the topping colors before the center finishes

Allergens

Wheat, Milk; check pasta labels for egg. Check labels and substitutions.

Make it

1. Heat oven to 400°F (205°C). Put the dish on a rimmed sheet and bring pasta water to a boil. Cook frozen spinach with its water according to the packet, usually 5–7 minutes, until thoroughly cooked. Cool promptly until safe to handle, squeeze dry in a clean towel and chop any long fibers.

2. Meanwhile heat oil in the skillet over medium heat. Cook onion 7–9 minutes until soft, then garlic for 30 seconds. Add crushed tomatoes, passata, sauce water, lentils, oregano, salt and pepper. Simmer 10–12 minutes until thick but still moist.

3. Boil penne for 2 minutes less than its packet time, drain without rinsing and fold into the sauce with cooked squeezed spinach. Spread the hot mixture in the dish and scatter mozzarella.

4. Bake 20–25 minutes until the top is lightly golden and the center and several other points reach 165°F (74°C). Shield the surface loosely with foil if needed while the center finishes.

5. Rest 5 minutes and divide into six portions.

Keep the green threads separate

Loosen the squeezed chopped spinach with a fork before folding it in. A few deliberate folds distribute it more effectively than stirring the entire pan hard enough to break the lentils.

A useful detail

The 80-minute total allows the spinach cooking/cooling alongside the sauce, overlapping pasta boiling, the full oven finish and rest. Canned lentils are the specified starting ingredient; dry lentils cannot go straight into this sauce.

Keep it well

Refrigerate shallow portions within 2 hours, or 1 hour above 90°F (32°C), at 40°F (4°C) or below. Use within 3 days or an earlier opened-ingredient deadline. Reheat to 165°F (74°C), adding a little water if needed. Freeze promptly cooled portions for up to 1 month for quality; thaw in the refrigerator. Carry chilled portions with two cold sources or place directly in a refrigerator.