Rice and Lentil Pepper Halves

4 filled pepper halves; 2 halves and half the complete filling per person | Active 20 min | Cook 18 min | Total 45 min

Ingredients

• 2 large red bell peppers, about 300 g (10.6 oz) after stems, seeds and ribs are removed, cut lengthways into 4 broad halves

• 75 ml (5 US tbsp) water, divided: 45 ml (3 US tbsp) for peppers and 30 ml (2 US tbsp) for filling

• 1 unopened commercially packed 250 g (8.8 oz) ready-to-eat plain rice pouch whose label explicitly permits eating it cold without cooking

• 160 g (5.6 oz) ready-to-eat canned lentils, drained and rinsed

• 120 g (4.2 oz) ripe tomatoes, washed and finely diced with all juice retained

• 15 g (0.53 oz) tomato paste

• 3 g garlic, about 1 small clove, finely chopped

• 5 ml (1 US tsp) olive oil

• 1 g ground cumin, about 1/2 US tsp

• 0.5 g fine salt, a small pinch

• 60 g (2.1 oz) cheddar, grated

Set out

1000 W microwave with turntable, Shallow microwave-safe dish, about 27 cm (10 2/3 in) across and at least 1.5 L (1.6 US qt) capacity, Microwave-safe vented cover for dish, Microwave-safe bowl, 1 L (1.1 US qt), with vented cover, Knife and board, Fork and spoon, Kitchen scale and measuring jug, Food thermometer with thin tip for the filling, Oven mitts, Two serving plates

Allergens

Milk. Check labels and substitutions.

Make it

1. Place the pepper halves cut-side down in the shallow dish with 45 ml water. Cover with the vented cover and microwave at 1000 W full power for 4 minutes. Turn them carefully and heat 2-3 minutes more until the walls are tender. Arrange all four cut-side up, retaining the steaming water in the dish.

2. In the 1 L bowl mix tomatoes and their juice, lentils, tomato paste, garlic, olive oil, cumin, salt and the separate 30 ml water. Cover and microwave at full power for 2 minutes, stir, then heat 1-2 minutes more until the tomatoes have softened and the base is hot. Open the selected ready-to-eat cold-permitted rice pouch and break up the grains with the fork.

3. Stir the entire 250 g rice portion through the hot tomato-lentil base, then divide all the filling equally among the four tender pepper halves, keeping the mounds low. Add 15 g cheddar to each. Cover the dish and microwave at full power for 3 minutes. Turn the dish, check and heat in 1-minute bursts for about 2-4 minutes more until the center of every filled half reaches 165°F/74°C. Recheck after further heating if any center is cooler.

4. Stand covered for 2 minutes. Serve two filled halves per person, dividing all the small amount of tomato-tinted liquid in the dish between the plates. These are soft steamed peppers with melted cheese, not an oven-browned bake.

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Four broad halves

Each half receives one-quarter of the rice-lentil filling and 15 g cheese. If the peppers are too small to hold that mound shallowly, choose larger broad peppers rather than compressing a deep cold center.

Check every filled center

Four halves can heat differently around a plate. Rotate the dish and check all four centers with the thermometer before beginning the covered stand.

Ingredient labels

Check the selected rice pouch, lentils and tomato paste for any additional ingredients or allergens.

A useful detail

The 45-minute planning total allows preparation, up to 7 minutes empty-pepper heating, 4 minutes tomato-lentil heating and 7 minutes final stuffed-pepper heating, the covered stand and serving. All heating uses one oven in sequence. The rice has no separate pouch heat because this recipe specifically requires a cold-permitted ready-to-eat product. A product with mandatory package cooking is not an equivalent substitution for this method.

Another way

Replace the lentils with 160 g (5.6 oz) drained ready-to-eat canned black beans, lightly crushed so the filling sits securely.

Replace cheddar with 60 g (2.1 oz) crumbled feta, divided 15 g over each half. It softens rather than stretching; the dish remains milk-containing.

Keep it well

Eat promptly. If saving a portion, put filled halves in shallow containers and refrigerate quickly, ideally within 1 hour of heating the rice, at 40°F/4°C or below. Use within 24 hours or sooner if the rice label requires it. Eat saved portions cold: the commercially cooked rice has already had its reheating stage in the stuffed peppers, so do not reheat them again. Do not reset the rice clock because lentils or cheese were added.