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News Release

The Mighty Bean

Beans rarely get the respect they deserve. In fact, beans were one of the first agricultural crops cultivated by humans. Beans provided early farmers with the sustenance they needed which allowed them to live in one place. Historically, farmers have grown beans and grains together. These two crops are essentially made for one another. The beans and grains together contain all of the amino acids needed to form a complete protein, which is the foundation for growth and development. The Native Americans grew a variety of beans and corn. Other combinations include lentils and rice, lima, kidney, pinto, and black beans with corn, and chickpeas and couscous. Beans can be combined with nuts and seeds to form a complete vegetable protein as well.

Beans are very low in fat (2-3%) and contain essential B vitamins, folic acid, potassium and iron. Beans may also help reduce your cholesterol. Soluble fiber found in beans, peas, chickpeas, and lentils forms a gel in the digestive system which is shown to decrease blood cholesterol levels and moderate spikes in blood sugar by slowing the release of sugar into the bloodstream. Insoluble fiber found in peas, beans, and lentils provides bulk to help speed up the passage of food through the intestine.

If you must watch your sodium intake, simply rinse canned beans in a colander under running water. This will remove the excess salt. Or better yet, soak dried beans for a couple of hours in water to revive them, cook and add your own seasonings. Dried lentils go well with a little chopped onion, minced ginger, ground turmeric, fennel seed, cumin, ground red pepper, cilantro, parsley, and lemon juice. If you want your lentils to be creamy, add a little minced ginger and a few spinach leaves or add some plain yogurt toward the end of cooking.

Smother Lentils

Ingredients:

Ten, small fresh spinach leaves

1 cup dried lentils

2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger

4 cups chicken-stock or water

One medium onion, finely chopped

2 tablespoons olive oil

Directions:

In a medium (2-1/2 to 3-quart) saucepan, place spinach leaves on bottom and pile lentils and ginger on top to keep spinach from floating. Gently pour stock down one side. Allow soaking for 45 minutes to one hour.

Place saucepan on low heat. While lentils are heating, sauté onions in oil for five minutes. Add the onions to the lentils. After ten minutes on low, turn heat up to medium and bring lentils to simmer. Simmer for 20 to 30 minutes more until lentils are tender. Serve hot. Can be refrigerated and re-heated.

Recipe makes four servings.

For more information about this or other nutrition related topics please contact Regional Extension Agent, Jennifer Dutton, MS, LD, RD, at the St. Clair County Extension office by phone at (205) 338-9416 or email jld0021@aces.edu.