

## Top 10 Facts You Need to Know About Lentils



1. Lentils are nutritional powerhouses. They are cholesterol-free and sodium-free, and loaded with potassium, folate, iron and fiber. One serving of lentils boasts nearly half as much protein as a serving of pork, and *two times* as much protein as a serving of quinoa.
2. Lentils naturally cater to a variety of specialty diets, including gluten-free, vegetarian and allergen-friendly. Lentil flour can even be used as a wheat-flour alternative to make gluten-free baked goods (like the cookies pictured).
3. Lentils can be considered a protein *and* a vegetable, which gives foodservice providers in schools and healthcare settings flexibility in meeting menu regulations.
4. One serving of lentils costs \$0.07, compared to \$1.07 for a serving of beef.
5. Lentils are not just for soup! As carriers of flavor, lentils are somewhat of a blank canvas for creative menu conceptions. For example, you can boost the nutrient content in baked goods by adding lentil purée, or drastically lower the cost per serving in a lasagna recipe (pictured) by replacing half the ground beef or pork with lentils, without negatively impacting flavor or texture.
6. Lentils do not need to be soaked before cooking. Preparing lentils is much the same as rice or quinoa. Simply rinse with water, and then bring lentils and water (1:2.5 lentil:water ratio) to a boil, and then simmer for 20 to 30 minutes.
7. All lentils are not created equal. Softer lentils, like red lentils, work best for soups, dhals and purées, and firmer lentils, like French green lentils, are ideal for salads, fritters and veggie burgers.
8. Dry lentils have a shelf-life of over a year, and cooked lentils can be frozen for up to three months or stored in the refrigerator for up to one week.
9. All U.S.-grown lentils are non-GMO. This is increasingly important as consumers are not only concerned with what ingredients are in their food, but with how those ingredients were produced.
10. Many foods are positioned as the “superfood of the future,” but lentils really make a good play for the title. In addition to their nutritional benefits, lentil crops need very little water and don’t require chemical fertilizer or burning between growing seasons. With an increasing consumer attention on climate change, a whole food source with a low carbon footprint and little reliance on fossil fuels is one to take note of.

Foodservice educators have the responsibility of recognizing and predicting long-term trends, and should be cautious of fads that may run their course by the time today’s culinary students become foodservice professionals. If there’s one trend the foodservice industry has seen continuously on the rise, it’s the consumer attention to what’s in their food. As a truly sustainable, versatile and nutrient-rich food source, lentils aren’t going anywhere—except maybe into more foodservice curricula!