



Carrot, Lentil and Spinach Ragu, served with spaghetti

This is a meat-free version of a traditional Italian ragu – perfect for serving with spaghetti or using in lasagne and other pasta dishes.

Organisation and skill: ★★★ **Cost:** £ £ £ **Equipment:** 

Community involvement: children under supervision, young adults, families, older people

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion – finely chopped
- 2 carrots – finely chopped or coarsely grated
- 1 celery stick – finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves – crushed
- 250g dried red lentils
- 400g can chopped tomatoes
- 1 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 vegetable stock cube, made up with 500ml boiling water
- few drops Worcestershire sauce or balsamic vinegar (optional)
- black pepper and salt to season
- 100g baby leaf spinach
- 300g spaghetti
- parmesan or vegetarian hard cheese – grated, to serve (optional)

Equipment

- chopping board
- sharp knife
- grater
- measuring jug
- large pan x2
- long-handled spoon – wooden or metal
- colander

Allergy aware:
Cereals containing gluten (spaghetti), Celery (also possibly in stock cube)
Fish (Worcestershire sauce)
Milk (cheese)

How to make it

- 1 Heat the oil in a large saucepan and add the onion, carrot, celery and garlic. Cook gently for 15–20 mins until everything is softened but not brown.
- 2 Stir in the lentils, chopped tomatoes, tomato purée, herbs and stock. Bring to a simmer, then cook for 40–50 mins until the lentils are tender and the sauce has thickened. If it looks too dry, add in a few spoons of water.
- 3 Taste and season the sauce with the Worcestershire sauce or balsamic vinegar if using and lots of black pepper. Add salt more cautiously and only if needed.
- 4 Keep the ragu on a low heat while you cook the spaghetti, following the instructions on the packet (usually 9–11 minutes). Add the baby leaf spinach to the ragu sauce about 5 minutes before the spaghetti is ready, allow it to wilt and then mix through.
- 5 Drain the spaghetti well and divide between pasta bowls or plates. Spoon sauce onto the pasta and grate over some cheese.

Serving suggestions: Serve this as a sauce for pasta or as a topping for jacket potatoes. A sprinkling of cheese and a crunchy salad completes the meal.

Cooking and sharing together

This sauce works brilliantly for batch cooking and for feeding large groups. Scale it up according to how big a cooking pan you have! Take care when seasoning large batches of food, especially with salt. Try adding a little, tasting and then adding more if needed.

Working as a team will make the preparation much quicker. The vegetables need to be chopped into small pieces so may not be suited to very young children or people with fine motor-skill difficulties.

Recipe hints and tips

This is cheap to make and can be adapted for use in different recipes, for example:

- thin it down with extra stock, blend it and serve as a soup.
- switch the herbs and tomato puree for spices like turmeric, cumin and coriander to make a dhal-type sauce that can be served with rice.
- Many of the ingredients are good store-cupboard buys, e.g. lentils, canned tomatoes, tomato puree, dried herbs, spaghetti. Buy them when they are on offer for even better value.

Storage wise: This recipe will keep in a sealed container in the fridge, for 2–3 days.

Portion wise: serves 4.

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