

Rich Red Lentil Spaghetti Bolognese

A traditional spaghetti bolognese recipe is a handy thing to have in your cooking repertoire, and this red lentil version is great if you suddenly find yourself having to create a hearty vegetarian or vegan meal without warning. This is my top go-to dinner when I am short on time and energy but want to make a hearty yet quick meal full of sustenance.

This recipe is simple, but it packs a lot of punch, and apart from the sundried tomatoes it uses everyday pantry staples. Providing you have a few tins of tomatoes and some red lentils floating around, you should be good to go.

The sundried tomatoes add an underlying depth which is accentuated with the addition of sweet paprika, balsamic vinegar and sugar at the end - the result is a thick satisfying velvety sauce full of flavour. Instead of serving it over spaghetti you could use it as the tomato layer in a vegetarian lasagne, and it is also nice served over brown rice and roast vegetables for something a bit different.

Ingredients

- Large jug extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 2 large sundried tomatoes, thinly sliced
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1/3 cup red lentils
- Large handful fresh thyme, finely chopped
- 2 tins / 800 grams tinned chopped tomatoes
- ½ tin water
- 1 tablespoon coconut sugar *OR* brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- ½ teaspoon sweet paprika
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- Black pepper to season
- 300 grams dried spaghetti

To top

- 50 grams parmesan, regular or vegan variety, grated
- Small handful of Italian parsley, finely chopped
- Good quality extra virgin olive oil

Method

1. Begin by putting a large pot of salted water on the heat to cook the spaghetti in. While you are waiting for it to boil, heat the olive oil up in a large shallow pan and gently sauté the onion and sundried tomatoes until the onion is soft. Add the garlic, red lentils and thyme and stir, frying for a minute. Add the tinned tomatoes plus half a tin worth of water and simmer for 15 - 20 minutes until the lentils are cooked through, continuing to stir once in a while. If you find you need to add a bit more liquid add a bit more as it cooks.
2. Once the lentils are fully soft and the sauce has thickened, stir in the coconut sugar or brown sugar, balsamic vinegar, paprika and salt. Cook for a minute or two more, stirring, and season with a good grind of black pepper.
3. Cook the spaghetti until al dente, and drain, reserving ½ a cup or so of the pasta water – this is a good practice to get into in case you need to reheat your sauce and it is a bit dry, or if it needs a bit of extra fluid. Simply add a little at a time as the sauce reheats before serving.
4. Using tongs, mix a few splashes of extra virgin olive oil through the spaghetti, and place on a large serving platter, making a bit of a well in the centre to sit the sauce in.
5. Spoon the sauce over and top with parmesan cheese and finely chopped Italian parsley.
6. Serve with crusty bread and a light salad.