

Lee Nunn  
Community Internship Summer 2022  
Central Texas Food Bank

### **Partner Agency e-Newsletter Program Handout**

Topic: Lentils, the Power of the Pulse!

The humble lentil. A versatile protein packed seed from plants in the pea family *Fabaceae* called legumes. These plants are annuals, meaning they complete one life cycle in a growing season, are harvested and then need to be replanted from seed for next year's crop. Legumes have above ground pods with usually 2 seeds inside, so that actually makes the lentil a seed of a legume or what is called a *pulse*.

Fun fact: The English word describing the clear portion of the eye that light travels through, the lens, comes from the word lentil due to their biconcave shape.

Even though lentils are staples of many different country's cuisines including Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, Canada is actually the largest producer at 33% of the world's production followed by India at 25%. There is an endless color spectrum of lentils including the most widely eaten type, brown which has an earthy flavor, green that has a peppery flavor, yellow and red that are usually split, cook quickly and have a sweet nutty flavor, and Beluga, which is black and named after the caviar.

These tiny pulses pack a punch with a host of vitamins and minerals including B vitamins, especially folate which helps protect the heart, manganese, phosphorous and calcium for maintaining healthy bones and iron for hemoglobin production. Lentils also contain around 15g of fiber per cooked cup that aids in maintaining a healthy digestive tract. They are also full of polyphenols such as procyanidin and flavanols which are known to have strong antioxidant and anti-inflammatory affects.

Lentils are simple to cook. Just add water in a ratio of 2-3:1 with spices then simmer until the water is absorbed and the lentils are softened. Pulses contain anti-nutrients such as lectins, tannins, and phytates, but the cooking process greatly reduces the presence of these making the minerals more bioavailable. Cooked lentils may be refrigerated up to one week after cooking in a sealed container or frozen for up to 6 months. If not handled gently, lentils may fall apart when reheated. This should not affect the taste or the nutrition, only the appearance.

With this easy to cook, protein rich, versatile and affordable pulse, it's easy to see how incorporating them into your diet, hot or cold, is a smart and healthy move.