

Puy lentil and beetroot salad with goats cheese and walnuts

Recipe by Hester Guy, Photographed by Pippa Marffy

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The beauty of a salad like this is the ingredients and amounts are variable, so use whatever you have on hand.

Sadly New Zealand fresh goats is unavailable currently (Nieuwenhuis "Cloud" goats cheese is ideal for this style of recipe, available from the Hastings market) but soft goats cheese from Australia is available in the supermarket. Alternatively use feta of your choice.

Substitute walnuts with pistachios or toasted slithered almonds. Try always to buy local walnuts which I keep in the deep freeze, So often imported walnuts have a marked rancid flavour which permeates the whole dish.

When roasting vegetables, preheat the oven to 225° C fanbake, and cook vegetables in their own groups as the cooking times will vary. Vegetables should be tender but still have texture. Once the vegetables are placed in the oven, the temperature will drop to about 200° C, the high temperature ensures the vegetables will roast and colour slightly and not just steam. A low sided tray also helps with the colouring up of the vegetables as the steam can escape.

This salad can also be served warm to accompany grilled meat or chicken.

Ingredients for Vegetables:

- **3 cooked beetroot**, peeled, cut in half and cut into orange size segments
Combined with: a slug olive oil, 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar, 2 tsp brown sugar NZ sea salt and freshly ground pepper to season.
- **2 red onions** peeled, cut in half and cut into orange size segments
Combined with: a slug olive oil, 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar, 1-2 tsp brown sugar NZ sea salt and freshly ground pepper to season.
- **Bunch baby carrots**, trimmed, peeled, tossed in olive oil and NZ sea salt and freshly ground pepper.
- **2-3 small heads fennel**, quartered, tossed in olive oil and NZ sea salt and freshly ground pepper.
- About 100g **fresh goats cheese or feta**
- A handful of **walnut halves**, lightly toasted
- A generous handful **rocket leaves**
- A small bunch **mint or parsley**
- A slug of **extra virgin olive oil**
- Juice **1 lemon**
- Garnish: violets, heartsease, or nasturtium flowers

Ingredients for lentils:

- 1 cup Puy lentils
 - 2 cups water
 - 2 cloves garlic crushed
 - 2 bay leaves
 - NZ sea salt and freshly ground pepper to season
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Method:

1. Preheat oven to 225 C
2. Place Puy lentils in a saucepan with ingredients listed . Simmer gently for 20-30mins until lentils are soft and liquid has evaporated. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil.
3. Roast beetroot, onions, carrots and fennel until cooked and lightly coloured. Times will vary but allow approximately 15 -30 mins for each vegetable. When cooked place each variant on a tray, keeping them separate.
4. Assemble the remaining ingredients:
Crumble feta cheese, toast walnut halves, chop mint of parsley, wash and spin rocket.
5. To Assemble Salad:
Layer ingredients up on a large platter. Do not toss as the beetroot will turn everything pink. Finish with rocket, feta and walnuts. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and lemon juice.
Finally garnish with flowers, (the flowers always go on last otherwise they have a very bedraggled look!)

NB The vinegar and lemon juice used in the recipe forms a natural dressing with the olive oil.