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)
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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.