

You will need: two scoops of lentils (any color except red), half an onion, one celery stalk, one carrot, three garlic cloves, oil (any kind), salt and pepper, fresh thyme (optional), one bay leaf, one 15-ounce can of diced tomatoes, one quart of vegetable broth, red wine or sherry vinegar, spinach (optional), a blender or food processor (optional)

Step
1



Rinse the lentils in a colander or strainer.

Step
2



Finely chop all the vegetables.

Step
3



Coat the bottom of a pot with **oil and heat**. Add the vegetables and cook until they're **softened**. Season with salt and pepper.

Step
4



Add the thyme (if using), bay leaf, tomatoes and their juices, lentils, and broth and **simmer, covered**, for 30 minutes or until the lentils and vegetables are soft.

Step
5



Check to see if the soup needs any additional salt or pepper, and finish with a **drizzle of vinegar**.

Optional: Add a few handfuls of **spinach** and stir until wilted. Also optional: **Purée half of the soup** in a blender and add it back to the pot for a creamier texture.

*From the store to the kitchen to the table: We outline the steps that get you from raw ingredients to your dinner tonight, free of measurements and complicated techniques. It's a method you'll remember and whip out whenever you like. It is the most basic way to make the thing you're making.

Illustrations by Bill Russell. Find this online at www.chow.com/stories/11542.