

TASTE

CELEBRATING THE LENTIL

Pullman WA

by Tamara Muldoon

Margee Berry could not stop grinning after being announced First Place winner of the 2014 Legendary Lentil Cook-off contest, part of the 26th annual National Lentil Festival in Pullman, WA. Berry, a resident of White Salmon, WA, proudly displayed an oversized \$2,000 check for her recipe, "Warm Weather Watermelon and Lentil Gazpacho."

Amateur chefs from 24 states submitted 114 lentil recipes to the 2014 Cook-off. From these, organizers selected five finalists who traveled to Pullman to compete for first, second and third place. Festival-goers lined up to claim one of 100 tokens, allowing them to taste each of the finalist's recipes and vote for the People's Choice award, while a panel of judges sampled each dish and then deliberated to choose the winners. Treated like celebrities, Cook-off finalists are transported around town by limousine, take part in the Grand Parade, and are hosted at

the comfy, family-owned Hilltop Inn (hilltopinpullman.com).

In the eastern Washington town of Pullman, the lentil is king—celebrated with an annual festival since 1989. And with good reason; the fertile Palouse agricultural region surrounding Pullman grows 25 percent of the lentils produced in the United States.

Pullman's family-friendly National Lentil Festival takes place in August, the weekend before fall term begins at resident Washington State University. Festivities kick off on Friday evening with free tastings from the World's Largest Bowl of Lentil Chili, two live music stages, beer and wine garden, food vendors and a bustling Marketplace.

Saturday's busy schedule begins with the Lion's Club Lentil Pancake Breakfast, followed by the Grand Parade and a lively day full of food, music, games, children's activities and the Cook-off contest. Athletically-inclined folks compete in the 5K Fun Run,

RECIPE

Warm Weather Watermelon and Lentil Gazpacho

Recipe by Margee Berry, first place winner of the 2014 Legendary Lentil Cook-off contest, courtesy of The National Lentil Festival

Ingredients

- 4 cups cubed, peeled seedless watermelon
- 1 cup cubed cucumber
- 2 trimmed green onions, chopped
- 1 small jalapeno pepper, chopped and seeds removed
- 1 medium ripe plum tomato, chopped
- ¼ cup fresh lime juice
- 2 Tbsp. fresh mint, chopped
- 1 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 Tbsp. agave nectar or honey
- 1 tsp. chipotle hot sauce
- ½ tsp. ground cumin
- 1/3 cup cilantro, chopped
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 ½ cups cooked USA-grown lentils

Directions

Place all ingredients except the lentils in a food processor or blender, reserving some cilantro or mint leaves for garnish. Puree until smooth, transfer to a large bowl and stir in lentils. Chill soup in refrigerator for at least one hour. To serve, ladle soup into bowls and garnish. Serves 6 to 8.
Tip: For best results, chill the produce before chopping.

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TASTE

Tour de Lentil Bike Ride, Co-ed Softball Tournament and 3-on-3 Hoop Classic.

"We're on a mission to teach everyone how quick, easy and affordable it is to cook with lentils," says Kim Davidson of PNW Co-op Specialty Foods, a festival sponsor. True to the festival theme, food vendors each offer at least one dish containing lentils. Other lentil-centric activities include cooking demonstrations and an Ask-The-Experts panel sharing all there is to know about Lens culinaria, especially its dietary benefits.



Margee Berry preparing her first place gazpacho

Beneath the lentil's squat, nondescript exterior lies a nutritional powerhouse. One half-cup of cooked lentils contains 4 grams of fiber, 9 grams of protein, and only 115 calories. They are cholesterol and gluten-free, and low in sodium and fat. Each year, festival organizers produce a cookbook containing all of the submitted Cook-off recipes.

The 2015 festival takes place August 21-22; visit lentilfest.com for more information or to order a cookbook. Go to pullmanchamber.com for information about visiting Pullman and the Palouse region.

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