

gentle lentils

only rhyming foods from here on out

Alison Roman Sep 30   



Welcome to A Newsletter #39. After #40 I will almost certainly run out of clever things to say! Send help. If you've found your way over by some miracle but are not yet subscribed, here, let me help you with that:

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these lentils, they are gentle

Hello! I appreciate your patience with me as I disappear to both work on other projects and just generally regroup, stabilize and refocus. All good and exciting things to share soon, I promise.

The end of summer is historically a bizzare time for me, but I will say it did make me feel less alone to hear everyone I caught up with the last few

weeks describe their summer as “weird,” “not what I thought it would be,” and “pretty terrible, honestly.”

It also made me feel less alone to read a few things recently that really hit home, cut to the core, etc.

First, this eloquent and devastatingly perfect speech from Michaela Cohel in acceptance of her Emmy for her writing on I May Destroy You. [Here is a great article](#) explaining better than I can why both her win and this speech were so important.



Then, after a night at Ernesto’s dissecting the concept of “main character syndrome” with a friend ([who has a new book out this week!](#)), she sent me [this article via The New Yorker](#) which I read at least four times in 48 hours.

Once you get past the fox metaphor and realize it’s not another “the internet is weird, right?” piece, the story dives into what it means to be a human person living at scale, which the internet effectively makes possible for anyone who wants it. Reading it felt like going to therapy, like someone reaching inside my brain to unscramble it. Reading it made me feel lighter and more seen, which Chris Hayes points out is perhaps our greatest ambition and also, arguably, part of our collective problem.

Both are worth reading in full many times over, but Cohel summed *it* all up most effectively:

"In a world that entices us to browse the lives of others to help us better determine how we feel about ourselves, and to, in turn, feel the need to be constantly visible — for visibility, these days, seems to somehow equate to success — do not be afraid to disappear. From it, from us, for a while. And see what comes to you in the silence."

A gut punch, no? Figuring out how to allow ideas to come not as a reaction to what others are doing but as a reaction to your own desires and creativity. To quit using the progress of others as a yardstick for your own. To figure out how to use clever self-promotion to quite literally pay the bills without letting it bully you into reevaluating your own self-worth. To be honest, authentic, and vulnerable without teetering on whatever your threshold for overexposure is. None of this is new, but it is all still tough to figure out, learn, and put into practice.

Whatever your experience with the internet is, it's natural to sink to your instinct that leads you to hibernate, retreat, mute, and recalibrate. Healthy, even! It's important to be gentle with ourselves, whatever form that may take. Which brings me to....lentils? Gentle lentils.

Last week a friend was admitted to the hospital for surgery, and this week, unrelated, another friend is having surgery. Both friends are doing okay, thank you for asking, but as anyone knows, surgery of any sort is an emotionally exhausting and physically taxing experience. Various medications, sedatives, etc. can throw your whole situation out of balance, leaving your body unable to fully process any sort of intensity which can include some foods.

As is the best way I know how to care for people, I will be bringing them food to keep in their fridge and freezer, and as I've done with my postpartum friends, I wanted to research what foods are helpful for people that have undergone minor and or major procedures. Most said similar things: Anti-inflammatory ingredients. Things rich in antioxidants. Nutritionally-dense liquids. Everything I read mentioned foods that could be described as "gentle*" (lol **hi Christina Chaey, fellow gentle food evangelist!).**

****I am not a doctor or a nutritionist, but I'm interpreting "gentle" to mean not difficult to chew, swallow or digest, ingredients and combinations of things that'll go easy on your digestive system when your body is busy healing in***

other places. I'll also add to that interpretation that "gentle" can be something that's easy, comforting, and soothing to consume. Lack of intense chewing, nothing wildly acidic, spicy, or intensely flavored.

It should come as no surprise that nothing about me, including the food I cook, could be described as gentle. But for those I love: I can be gentle! For those I love: I can cook gently!

Anyway, about these lentils. When I read the word "gentle" I think "lentil". Not only do the two words rhyme (I personally find that very fun!), but they rhyme (!!!). Also, lentils are actually quite gentle IMO: soft in texture, high in protein and fiber, rather neutral in flavor, all around nothing boat-rocking about them unless you season them that way.

When cooked in simmering water or stock, certain lentils stay whole and grain-like, some succumb to a porridge-like texture, effortlessly finding a rare middle ground, something that's smoother than a stew, more interesting than a puree yet similar to both (i.e. dal*, split pea soup). Here, for the sake of reinforcing the gentleness, I'm referring to the latter.

**If you're familiar with food originating in South Asia, you might know that both the ingredient (any dried, split legume that doesn't require soaking or long cook times, i.e. yellow lentils, mung beans, split green peas) and the preparation of said ingredient can be referred to as dal. If I am wrong about this, please let me know!*

As a person married to the idea that punchy, crunchy, intensely flavored foods taste the best, it's nice to remind myself that there's room for gentleness and gentle doesn't have to mean boring. These (secretly slightly punchy-yet-still-gentle because I am who I am) lentils are added to a pot with little half-moons of lemon, thinly sliced garlic and scallion, cilantro stems, and a small bit of turmeric that have all been lightly fried in coconut oil (olive oil or ghee would be great, too). Then, just enough water added to cover, because these lentils need nothing more. Could they be great also cooked in chicken broth with bits of leftover chicken dispersed throughout? Definitely. Would it be good to spoon yogurt or sour cream over after being cooked? 100%. Are they perfect all on their own, swimming in their accidentally-vegan glory? I think so.

The recipe for lentils with sizzled lemon and scallion will go out tomorrow to all paid subscribers, which I hope you'll become!

subscribe for lentils

As always, thank you for reading, and please: be gentle with yourself. See you next week for Home Movies Tuesday!



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