

Lucky Lentils For a Prosperous New Year

Start 2019 over on Jan. 14 -- Old Style New Year

By [Jennifer Eremeeva](#)

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Start the year (again) with lucky lentils. **Jennifer Eremeeva / MT**

Here's a well-kept secret: I hate New Year's Eve. Don't get me wrong: I like the Russian tradition of greeting the New Year with a clean house. If I had my way, I'd spend all of December 31st in a flurry of clutter-busting: throwing out all the dross in my sock drawer, pantry, and on my hard drive. I'd banish OPCs (other people's condiments) from my fridge, purge my file drawers, and fall into an exhausted but satisfied heap at 7:00 PM and go to bed stone cold sober, sleep for 12 hours and wake up feeling like a million dollars.

This wasn't what happened, of course. I did all the clean-up in the morning, and then spent the rest of the day up to my arms in mayonnaise preparing for the long evening that never ends, while everyone else lolled around watching "The Irony of Fate."

There never seems to be enough time on New Year's Eve: it's a marathon hustle culminating in the 11:55 PM five-minute presidential address. New Year's Eve is almost always dark,

usually stormy, and I spend far too much time lamenting that the clock has well and truly run out on all of the goals I had for the year about to end. I didn't run that marathon, I failed to become fluent in Italian, I haven't finished and sold the book I'm writing, I didn't start my systematic investment program, and, as ever, my BMI needs a ton of work.

But I managed to stay somewhat cheerful throughout December 31st because of my favorite holiday is on the horizon: New Year's Day!

Is there anything like the purity and sanctity of January 1st? A brand-new year, an unmarked calendar, and new resolutions like monthly Iron Man triathlons, finishing my 3-volume historical novel, and coming up with new and improved income streams. Thirty-day detoxes seem laughingly easy, as do juice cleanses and yoga retreats. On January 1st, it all seems eminently possible and easily within reach.

Because I'm usually the first to declare exhaustion minutes after the president finishes his stirring address, I tend to celebrate much of January 1st in solitude, which is perfect for contemplation of achieving greatness over the next 365 days.

If you missed the opportunity, you're in luck. Clever Russians celebrate New Year's twice – new style and old style – so you get another chance to start the year on the right foot. I plan to ceremonially crack open the new productivity journal sitting in its plastic wrap on my desk and make myself a delicious bowl of lentils to ring in 2019 in a time-honored tradition.

From ancient times, lentils have been essential in supplicating good fortune as one year ended and a new one began. The shape and color of brown lentils were very similar to ancient Roman coins, and because lentils swell in size when cooked, they were believed to be potent talismans of prosperity for the New Year.

To this day, Italians give one another a symbolic leather bag or *scarsella* filled with lentils, in the hopes that these might be magically turned into gold coins. And, of course, it is traditional to celebrate the new year with a dish made from lentils.

Most years, I make a hearty lentil stew with sausages or lentil and chestnut soup. This year, however, I pulled out a recipe from Armenia and adapted it into this light, nourishing warm duck and lentil salad.

This is a fresh and flavorful recipe that ticks a lot of boxes: easy to make ahead of time and, in addition to the numerous health benefits of lentils, it is full of healthy herbs, fruits, vegetables, and greens, and has very little fat in the dressing. It's the perfect way to start 2019 off on a healthy, delicious, and who knows...possibly even a prosperous note.

Warm wishes for a delicious 2019!

Lentil & Duck Salad with Shaved Winter Vegetables

Serves 4-6

Ingredients

- 2 duck breasts

- 240 ml beluga lentils
- 2 bay leaves
- Zest and juice of 2 tangerines
- 125 ml red wine vinegar
- 3-4 garlic cloves, grated
- 175 ml olive oil
- 2 Tbsp grated fresh ginger
- 2 Tbsp pomegranate molasses
- Seeds of 1 medium-sized pomegranate
- 1 bunch fresh scallions, sliced
- 1 large parsnip
- 1 fennel bulb and any fronds that come with it
- 80 ml fresh dill, roughly chopped
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 500 ml of peppery greens such as watercress or arugula
- Salt and pepper

Instructions

- Pick through the dried lentils, discarding any discolored pulses or “stones.” Rinse well under cold running water, then place in a large pot with 700 ml of well-salted water and the bay leaves. Bring to a vigorous simmer, then reduce heat and cook, covered for 15-20 minutes over low heat. Use a flat spoon to skim off any foam that rises to the top. You want the lentils to be al dente: keeping their “lucky” shape without turning into “lentil sludge.” Be mindful that they will continue to cook for several minutes once you have drained them.
- While the lentils are cooking, whisk together the tangerine zest and juice, red wine vinegar, olive oil, ginger, garlic, and about 2 tsp of salt. Decant one-fourth of the dressing and set aside. When the lentils are cooked so that you can bite down easily on one, drain them in a colander and then immediately combine with three-quarters of the dressing. Discard the bay leaves. Set aside, covered for at least 40 minutes until cooled to room temperature. The lentils will absorb the dressing as they cool.
- Preheat the oven to 205°F.
- If your duck breasts come with skin, use a sharp knife to score a cross-hatch pattern through the layer of fat, taking care not to pierce the flesh of the duck itself. In an oven-proof skillet over medium-low heat, sear the breasts, skin side down, until the fat is almost entirely rendered, and the cross-hatched fatty layer is golden brown. Decant the liquid fat into a clean jar and reserve for another use.
- Salt and pepper the flesh side of the duck breasts and place them in the preheated oven for 10 minutes to finish cooking, skin side down. Allow them to “rest” until they come to room temperature.
- While the duck and lentils are resting, prepare the winter vegetables. I encourage you to let your creativity go wild here: I like the contrasts of fennel and parsnips with the meaty flavor of the duck and lentils, but carrots, cucumbers, celery root, bok choy, radishes, bell peppers, and leeks will work equally well here. You can also veer towards complimentary fruits including quince, apple, persimmon, or dried cherries.
- Thinly slice whatever vegetables you are using: I used a vegetable peeler to shave the parsnip after I peeled it and the same approach works well with carrots. For radishes and

fennel, the mandoline helps me get the slices very thin.

- Toss the vegetables with a few teaspoons of fresh lemon juice and a sprinkling of salt so that they don't get discolored, and set them aside until the last minute; avoid adding these vegetables while the lentils are still warm to prevent them wilting and losing their crunch.
- Check the lentils and add the remaining dressing and salt and pepper if needed. Toss very lightly with the scallions and dill and fennel fronds if using. This salad works as well "tossed" in a large shallow bowl as it does "plated" on a festive platter, but the latter makes for an impressive presentation.
- If you serve the dish on a platter, slice the duck and arrange with the shaved winter vegetables, peppery greens, and lentils. Finish with a drizzle of the pomegranate molasses and scatter the pomegranate seeds liberally over everything.
- Serve at room temperature.

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