

Cheesy Lentil & Spaghetti Squash Bake with Mushrooms

Yield 4 hearty servings | Prep time 40 minutes | Bake time 15 minutes

1 small spaghetti squash (1 ½ pounds)
Olive oil
Fine sea salt
½ ounce (15g) dried porcini mushrooms
1 medium onion, sliced thinly
1 teaspoon cumin seeds, coarsely crushed
1 teaspoon fennel seeds, coarsely crushed
1 teaspoon coriander seeds, coarsely crushed
Freshly ground black pepper
12 ounces (340g) button or cremini mushrooms, quartered
4 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
One 14.5 ounce can whole or crushed tomatoes
1 cup green, brown, or black lentils, rinsed and picked over
1 heaping cup (4 to 5 ounces) coarsely grated cheddar cheese

Any cheese you like would be suitable here — mozzarella, crumbles of goat cheese, or even something punchy like bleu cheese.

Instead of cheese, crack 4 eggs (1 per person) into the lentils before baking, and cook until the whites are just set but the yolk runny, 8 to 10 minutes.

1. Roast the spaghetti squash: Preheat the oven to 400°F. Cut the squash in half crosswise and rub all over with olive oil, then place cut-side down in a 2-quart baking dish. Roast for 25 to 35 minutes, until you can easily pierce it with a knife. Flip each piece over and allow to cool until safe to handle.

2. Meanwhile, put the porcini mushrooms in a heat-safe bowl and cover with boiling water. Let stand until softened, about 10 minutes. Lift from the water, reserving the water, and coarsely chop. Pour the soaking water into a measuring glass (leaving behind any sediment in the bowl) and add enough extra water to yield 2 cups.

3. Set a Dutch oven or other large, deep skillet over medium heat. When hot, swirl in 2 to 3 tablespoons of olive oil, and add the onion and ½ teaspoon salt. Cover to let the onions steam for 5 to 8 minutes, then uncover and cook until soft and starting to color, 10 to 15 minutes more. Stir in the seeds, several grinds of black pepper, and the mushrooms. Once the mushrooms are juicy, after 8 to 10 minutes, stir in the garlic and porcini. Then add the vinegar, tomatoes, lentils, ¼ teaspoon additional salt, and the reserved 2 cups porcini soaking liquid. Bring to a simmer, cover, and cook until the lentils are tender, about 20 minutes or more. Remove from the heat.

4. Use a fork to scrape and pull the spaghetti squash flesh off the skins, creating strands. Stir into the lentils. Transfer the mixture into the baking dish and scatter the cheese on top. Return to the oven and bake until the cheese is melted and blistered in part, 10 to 15 minutes. Then serve hot, garnished with extra olive oil and salt if needed.