Main dishes / Türkiye

Turkish Red Lentil Soup (Mercimek Çorbası)

A soup of such simple ingredients that its depth of flavor seems almost impossible — red lentils collapse to velvet in under 40 minutes, transformed by a pul biber butter poured at the table into something smoky, earthy, and quietly magnificent.

Time 40 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Red lentils, rinsed
- ☐ 40 parts Yellow onion, diced
- ☐ 20 parts Carrot, diced
- ☐ 3 parts Ground cumin
- ☐ 2 parts Pul biber (Aleppo pepper)
- ☐ 300 parts Vegetable or chicken stock
- ☐ 10 parts Olive oil
- ☐ 8 parts Butter (for the finishing oil)
- ☐ 5 parts Fresh lemon juice, for serving
- ☐ 3 parts Fine sea salt

Let's make it.

01 Heat olive oil in a large heavy pot over medium heat. Add the onion and carrot and cook, stirring occasionally, for 8–10 minutes until the onion is completely soft and translucent and beginning to show faint golden color at the edges. Do not rush this — the sweetness of slow-cooked onion and carrot forms the flavor base of the soup, which cannot be added back later.

02 Add the cumin and half the pul biber to the pot and stir constantly for 60 seconds until the spices are fragrant and toasting in the fat — this is called blooming and it activates fat-soluble flavor compounds that water alone cannot extract. Add the rinsed red lentils and stir to coat in the spiced oil. Pour in the stock, bring to a boil, then reduce to a steady simmer. Cook uncovered for 20–25 minutes, skimming any foam that rises in the first 5 minutes, until the lentils have completely dissolved into the liquid.

03 Remove the pot from heat. Using an immersion blender, blend the soup directly in the pot until completely smooth, about 2 minutes of continuous blending. Alternatively, transfer in batches to a stand blender (fill only halfway, cover with a kitchen towel, and hold the lid firmly — hot soup expands). The finished soup should be velvet-smooth with no fibrous texture from the lentil skins. If too thick, add warm stock to reach a pourable consistency similar to heavy cream.

04 In a small saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat until it foams and begins to brown — stop when it smells nutty and is deep golden. Add the remaining pul biber off the heat: it will sizzle and bloom immediately, turning the butter a vivid red-orange. Ladle the soup into warmed bowls. Drizzle the sizzling butter over each bowl in a thin spiral from the edge to the center. Serve immediately with a generous squeeze of lemon and warm bread. The contrast between the hot red butter and the smooth soup is the dish.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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