Perfect Lentil Soup
Serves 6 to 8

I am offering you three different cooking methods, and they all work great. If I have the time, slow-cooking is my favorite, but—here's the annoying part—I don't like slow-cooking in my Instant Pot. I feel like it kind of never gets hot enough to cook the lentils? Which is ironic, given that it really really wants to be heat all the way up and make an entire pot roast in 5 minutes. Is yours like that? Anyways, I use my Crock-Pot brand crockpot. When it's just Michael and me, I make a half recipe and there are leftovers.

¼ cup olive oil

1 onion, chopped

2 stalks celery, diced

2 carrots, diced

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

2 teaspoons kosher salt (or half as much table salt)

½ — 1 cup red or white wine (It doesn't have to be great, but it should be neither sweet nor oaky. My favorite is, like, chianti or sauvignon blanc or pinot noir.)

¾ cup tomato sauce (like Hunt's) or tomato puree or some other tomato product or ¼ cup tomato paste

2 cups lentils, rinsed and drained (I like to use the tiny green lentils de puy for this, or those other little ones that are black, but regular brown lentils are just fine too)

4 cups chicken broth or veggie broth (I use 4 cups of just-boiled water + 2 cubes of Edward & Sons Not-Chick'n Bouillon, which I just had to Google for both queer punctuation and the spelling of the word *bouillon*. Anyhoo Whole Foods Sells it) or 4 cups water + 2 teaspoons kosher salt

2 cups of diced peeled or skin-on potatoes (this is optional)

2 (more) cups water

1 bay leaf

1 sprig fresh thyme or 1/2 teaspoon dried

1 teaspoon balsamic or sherry vinegar

Optional Vinaigrette (see below)

Slow Cooker Method
Heat the olive oil in a wide pan and sauté the veggies (not the potatoes though) with the salt over medium heat until they're limp and browning--around ten minutes. Add the wine and the cook until it's reduced to a juicy glaze, then add the whole panful to your slow cooker with all the remaining ingredients and cook on high for 3 or 4 hours, or on low for 6 to 8 or longer (Okay, full disclosure: I sometimes feel like the lentils don't soften well on low? So I try to cook it on high for at least a couple of hours.) Add a cup or so water if it ever starts to seem too thick. Taste the soup for salt before serving.

Stovetop Method
Add the lentils to a soup pot with the broth, potatoes, water, bay leaf, and thyme, and bring to a boil over high heat. Lower the heat, cover the pot, and simmer while you prepare the rest of the ingredients. Heat the olive oil in a wide pan and sauté the veggies with the salt over medium heat until they're limp and browning—around ten minutes—then add the wine and cook until it's reduced to a juicy glaze. Add this panful to the lentils along with the tomato sauce and vinegar, and simmer the soup over very low heat, partially covered, for an hour, stirring every now and again to keep it from sticking, and adding water if it looks like it's drying out. When the lentils are nice and creamy, taste the soup for salt but honestly taste it early on too and if it's radically undersalted, salt it then.

Instant Pot Method
Heat the olive oil in the pot on the low sauté setting and cook the veggies with the salt until they're limp and browning—around ten minutes. Add the wine and the cook until it's reduced to a juicy glaze, then add the remaining ingredients, give it a big stir, put the lid on, cancel the sauté setting, and do the bean or soup setting (the one where it's under pressure for ½ hour), then let the steam release naturally or rush it by flipping the release thing and steaming your whole hand off—honestly either way is fine. Taste the soup for before serving.

I used to INSIST on this **vinaigrette topping**, but to be honest? I only sometimes make it now! But it really does add a certain vibrant pizzazz. Just mix together ¼ cup olive oil, 2 tablespoons balsamic or sherry vinegar, 1clove of pressed garlic and ½ teaspoon salt and drizzle a little over everyone's bowl.