

## **Strategies Applied:**

•This dish freezes well for a month or two – longer and the lentils may dry out. Cover the top with plastic wrap after placing in the container and before sealing.

•**Pearl Onions:** While there are many frozen vegetables I just ignore, pearl onions are such a huge time savings, and I don't find too much of a difference between fresh and frozen and always have some in my freezer. You could certainly omit, especially with the other onion in the recipe, but they do make this homey dish feel a little special. Look for specials and use coupons for frozen veggies, especially in the fall when you'll find rock bottom prices. Regular cost was \$1.69 for 10 ounces, but I paid 84 cents. 2/3rds of a cup, about 3 ounces is 25 cents.

•**Chorizo:** In my area, unless I go to a special market, the only option regularly available is Farmland chorizo, in the casing. Luckily, Farmland regularly has coupons, and especially after fall hits, the grocery has great prices on all kinds of sausage. I'll generally look for a price of about a dollar for any type of prepackaged sausage like chorizo and Italian, give it an extra wrap and throw it in my freezer. If you can't find chorizo, years ago I found a [\*\*Recipe for Chorizo\*\*](#) that I used often. (Ground pork can be pricey, though, and can easily pick up "off" flavors – which may be why it's so often used with lots of different spices, like in sausage – wrap it very well if you freeze it.)

•**Bacon:** Just like sausage, bacon is often at its best price in the fall – watch for store specials and the occasional coupon. The best prices I've been finding lately are \$2.99 a pound – there was a day bacon was considered a "cheap" food. I tend to use bacon more as a flavoring in dishes rather than as a breakfast side – I'll just slice off a strip or two from top to bottom and freeze the rest.

•**Olive Oil:** I have a whole strategy for buying [\*\*olive oil\*\*](#) – my cost for three tablespoons is about 24 cents. You could use less olive oil, but I think it's a great way to take advantage of the olive oil's high omega 3 count and it really is a "flavoring" for the dish as well as a way to cook it. If the veggies stick with just a small amount of oil, I often just add a little water and let it steam away.

•**Mushrooms:** These are always on sale about half price near any holiday, but if not, I'll look for store specials – especially two for one. [\*\*Button mushrooms\*\*](#) have been found to be slightly healthier than even the fancier portabellas and gourmet mushrooms – bonus!

•**Carrots:** Another item that generally is cheaper in the fall, I lucked out and found 5 pounds for \$1.99 – my target price is generally \$1.00 a pound. They

keep so well, there's no sense in not stocking up when they're cheap. (just make sure they're not wet from condensation)

•**Onion:** At 33 cents a pound, an onion is about 10 cents. Store in a dark, cool place away from your potatoes. I keep mine in a paper grocery sack by my kitchen door. Pick them up in quantity when you see them on sale.

•**Celery:** On sale for 98 cents, 2 stalks are about 20 cents. Celery keeps so well, there's no reason to not buy when it's not on sale. Remember to use your leaves, they're full of flavor, and if you don't use them in your cooking, save them, along with the bottom parts for soup or stock. Always wash your celery extremely well.

•**Garlic:** Runs around 59 to 99 cents a head in my area in the boxes. It can be a little tricky to discern the best prices because it can also be bought by the pound, and generally you'll pay less this way.

•**Thyme:** I think there are a few dishes where fresh thyme is key – this isn't one of them. Substitute about a scant 1/2 teaspoon of dried. Thyme grows easily outdoors or in, so bring some in during the fall to last through till spring.

•**Tomato Paste:** Often on the steepest sale in the fall, look for specials and coupons – I generally pick it up at no cost. Keep the excess in the freezer in a ziploc and you can just chop off the amount you need for a recipe.

•**Wine:** I never cook with expensive wine and am always looking for great bargains. Last spring I lucked out while traveling through Iowa – I stopped at a gas station and found Yellow Tail on sale, two for one, and picked up several bottles – If memory serves, 2 for \$4.99. This is the time of year, though (October through November) to look for some of the best pricing you'll find on wine – sign up for emails from a shop that is known for their wine and take advantage of the special offers and their expertise.

•**Lentils:** Buy in the fall, especially after Thanksgiving when you'll find rock bottom prices on all different types of beans and legumes. There are usually sales around New Year's as well. Quite often, the sales aren't advertised, so check the aisle. **Lentils**, like many other dried beans, are powerhouses of nutrition.

•**Mashed Potatoes:** I love using the red potatoes that come out in the fall – at about 66 a pound, they're a little pricier than russets, but with the skins on, a rough mash with some butter, a touch of milk, and a bit of salt can't be beat!