

Be Full of Beans !



Quiet fun with legumes

by Lorraine Mercedes Picot

Jumping beans. Jelly beans. You just know beans ought to be fun! Very close to being the perfect food among an increasingly long list of nasties, beans are definitely worth getting friendly with. Having fallen from grace for a few decades, beans are rightfully coming back with a vengeance.

Healthy Nutrition...

Assuming their rightful place in healthy cuisine, beans or *legumes* are tasty, versatile and economical - all this without saturated fats or cholesterol. They are high in protein and complex carbohydrates, rich in vitamins (especially B-complex) and minerals such as iron, calcium, magnesium & potassium and a superlative source of fiber. For those of you up on your antioxidants, beans are also a surprising source of Co-Enzyme Q10.

Improve your immune system, your digestion, reduce your risk of cancer, heart disease, and osteoporosis; beans can do it all. A recent Australian study pointed to beans as one of the significant factors in the diets of patients who were cancer-free compared to those with melanoma (skin cancer). Now don't you wish you were full of beans?

A Little History...

Legumes have been around for a long time. Recorded history traces one of the nobler beans, soybeans, back to 2838 B.C. in China, to the 6th century in Japan, and to the 17th century in Europe. You couldn't just zip open a can or rip open a bag of pre-cooked frozen beans back then, of course. These options are all available for those of you daunted by the prospect of soaking and cooking your own scratch beans.

Just remember that the canned variety is somewhat high in sodium and deserves a good rinse. They're also robbed of some of their important enzymes through the canning process which may account for their increased "gassiness" compared to the home-cooked or even frozen beans. We'll get back to that quirk shortly.

When buying dried legumes, look for beans of uniform size, with good colour and smooth, unwrinkled skins. They can be stored indefinitely in clean, hermetically sealed containers away from sunlight or heat. Glass containers are ideal for showing off beans' earthy esthetics. All cooked beans will keep several days in the refrigerator or up to six months in the freezer.

A Little Science...

Beans have a somewhat unsavoury reputation for causing flatulence and being difficult to digest. The guilty culprits have been identified. Their names are Raffinose, Stachyose, and this has got to be the loud one, Verbacose.

These three natural sugars require a good dose of the enzyme Galactosidase to be broken down and unobtrusively digested. Most people produce adequate amounts of this natural digestive factor but if your confidence quavers, just pop a couple of “Beano” tablets or digestive enzymes before that chili to give your gut a helping hand. The problem with flatulence can also be largely resolved with correct preparation and attention to food combining.

By pre-soaking beans and pouring out the soaking liquid, much of the gas-producing substances will be eliminated. By adding a piece of Kombu (seaweed) and /or a piece of peeled or scrubbed fresh ginger root to the cooking water, you will not only add flavour, but also further reduce gassiness. Finally, be sure to cook beans sufficiently; they will easily mash under a fork when they’re fully cooked. Enjoy these versatile little marvels in salads, soups, stews, spreads and dips, casseroles, burgers or loaves.

Cooking Method:

- Measure out required quantity for your recipe (soaked beans will swell to well beyond this).
- Pick through beans or lentils to remove any pebbles or blemished beans.
- Soak overnight or for at least 8 hours in fresh water.
- Drain soaking water and add fresh cold water according to cooking chart.
- Bring water to the boil in a heavy cooking pot.
- Reduce heat and simmer until beans are tender (see cooking chart below).
- You can add Kombu (seaweed), sliced raw ginger root, herbs, spices, garlic, and/or onions to cooking water.

Cooking Times and Measures for Legumes*

Beans (1 cup)	Water	Cooking time (no soaking)	Cooking time (8 hrs soaking)	Yield
Adzuki beans	3 cups	1 ½ hours	40 minutes	2 cups
Baby Limas	2 cups	1 ½ hours	30 minutes	1 ¾ cups
Black beans	3 cups	1 ½ hours	30 minutes	3 cups
Black-eyed beans	3 cups	1 hour	40 minutes	2 ½ cups
Chick peas	4 cups	3 hours	90 minutes	3 cups
Fava beans	3 cups	2 hours	1 hour	2 cups
Kidney beans	3 cups	3 hours +	2 hours	2 ½ cups
Lentils (brown)	2 cups	1 hour	30 minutes	2 ¾ cups
Lentils (red)	2 cups	30 minutes	15 minutes	2 ¾ cups
Lima beans	3 cups	1 ½ hour	45 minutes	2 ½ cups
Navy beans	3 cups	1 ½ hour	50 minutes	2 ¾ cups
Pinto beans	3 cups	2 ½ hours	50 minutes	3 cups
Red beans	3 cups	2 ½ hour	1 hour	2 cups
Soybeans	4 cups	3 hours +	2 hours	2 ½ cups
Split peas	3 cups	1 hour	15 minutes	2 ¼ cups
White beans	3 cups	2 ½ hours	1 hour	2 cups
Yellow peas	3 cups	3 hours	1 hour	2 cups

* The suggested times are approximate and depend on factors such as type of cookware, how tight-fitting is the lid, amount of heat, etc.

Pressure cookers work well for most legumes and generally cut cooking times by 1/3 or more. However, they shouldn't be used for very small beans, grits or red lentils as they may clog up the pressure vent.

Get Cooking...

SHEPHERD'S PIE WITH BEANS

Serves 6

4 lg. russet potatoes, scrubbed & diced
½ cup low-fat soy milk or regular milk
½ tsp. sea salt
½ cup vegetable broth or water
2 onions, chopped
2 stalks of celery, diced
2 carrots, sliced
2 cups mushrooms, sliced
1 15-ounce can diced tomatoes
2 cups cooked kidney beans, drained
½ tsp. paprika
dash of Tabasco sauce
2 Tbs. Tamari (soya sauce)

Steam the diced potatoes until tender. Mash them adding enough soy milk or regular milk to make them fluffy and spreadable. Season to taste.

In a large pot, heat the broth or water. Cook the onions for 3 minutes then add the celery and carrots. Cook for 5 minutes over medium heat. Add mushrooms. Cover and cook 5 minutes longer, stirring occasionally. Add the tomatoes, kidney beans, paprika, Tabasco, and tamari. Cover and cook for 10 - 15 minutes.

Pour the vegetables into a 9 inch x 13 inch baking dish and spread the mashed potatoes evenly over the top. Sprinkle generously with paprika. Bake at 350°F for 25 minutes, until hot and bubbly.

BEAN & MUSHROOM STROGANOFF

Serves 4

1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
1 onion, chopped
10 mushrooms, sliced
2 tsp. paprika
1 tsp. dried thyme
1 cup vegetable broth
2 Tbs. dry red wine
2 tsp. Worcestershire
2 cups cooked kidney (or other) beans
½ cup light sour cream
1 tsp red wine vinegar
2 tsp. cornstarch
Black pepper to taste
3 cups of cooked egg noodles
2 green onions, sliced

In a large frying pan, over medium heat, cook onion in olive oil for 3-4 minutes then add mushrooms. Continue cooking until soft (add a little water if sticking). Sprinkle with paprika and thyme, stir well.

Add broth, wine, Worcestershire sauce and stir until well blended. With a potato masher, crush about 1/3 of the beans; add to the skillet along with the rest of the beans and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 10 minutes until liquid is slightly reduced.

In a small bowl, combine sour cream, vinegar and cornstarch, stirring until smooth. Stir into bean mixture; reduce heat, and cook, stirring for 2 minutes until thickened. Season to taste. Serve over cooked noodles and garnish with green onion.



ZESTY LENTIL SOUP

Serves 6

1 cup brown lentils, well rinsed
5-6 cups vegetable broth or water
¾ cup diced potatoes
1 cup tomatoes, peeled and diced
1 medium onion, chopped
1 stalk celery, diced
1 medium carrot, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp. cumin seeds
1 tsp. ground coriander
¼ cup chopped cilantro
Juice of 1 lemon
1 tsp. lemon zest
sea salt to taste

Combine lentils, stock or water, potatoes, tomatoes, onion, celery, carrot and garlic in a large soup pot. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer for about 30 minutes.

Add cumin and coriander and simmer for 15 minutes more. Stir in remaining ingredients. Adjust seasonings before serving.

RICE-LENTIL BURGERS

Makes 6-8 patties

½ cup cooked brown rice, cooled
1 cup cooked brown lentils, cooled
1 small sweet potato, peeled, cooked and mashed
6 spinach leaves, blanched & chopped fine
½ cup fresh mushrooms, chopped
1 tsp. tamari
vegetable salt to taste
pinch of cayenne pepper
¾ cup whole-grain bread crumbs
1 clove garlic, minced
1 Tbs. fresh cilantro or parsley, chopped

Combine rice, cooked lentils, sweet potato, spinach and mushrooms in a large bowl. Add tamari, vegetable salt and pepper. Add bread crumbs, minced garlic, and cilantro and mix well. Refrigerate for 15-20 minutes.

Form mixture into 6-8 patties. Grill or broil in an oiled pan or grill for 3-4 minutes on each side.

Enjoy !

