

The Magic of Cooking Beans from Scratch

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As we spend more time at home, many of us are returning back to basics, especially around cooking. At our house, we have taken up baking bread, making bone broth, sprouting our own sprouts and we have also been making a lot of bean dishes from scratch. I have to admit that, in the past, I bought most of my beans in a can, but because we are home so much, it has become easier to soak the beans and boil them the next day.

Benefits of cooking beans from scratch.

There are 3 main reasons to cook your beans from scratch:

- 1) **Control the cooking** - There are times when I buy canned beans and they are either softer or harder than what I wanted. When you cook your own beans, you decide how soft you want them. You can also decide what to add to the beans to flavor them.
- 2) **Sodium** - Canned beans have about 100 times more sodium vs. beans made at home. Of course, you decide how much salt you add at home, but generally you will use considerably less at home AND you can use other herbs, spices and condiments to flavor your beans as you cook them.
- 3) **Expense** - Even though cans of beans don't seem that expensive you save a considerable amount of money and probably get better beans when you buy them dried instead of canned. Canned beans are in the neighborhood of 3 times the cost of dried. The average cost of a serving of dried beans is around 12 cents per serving. Compared to meat, it is an even larger savings as the average price of beef is often around 1.50 per serving. Huge difference!

How to Cook Delicious Beans from Scratch.

I used to think that cooking beans from scratch actually involved a high level of skill. Well, as it turns out, cooking beans is not rocket science especially if you follow a few steps.

- 1) **Make sure you have good beans.** Dried beans can last a long time in your pantry if they are stored well (airtight glass containers, dark space), but the sooner you use them the better. I try to use mine within a year, but two years is usually fine. If your beans are moldy or smell weird then throw them out and get some new beans.
- 2) **Why do I check for rocks?** Bags of dried beans always have instructions on the package to check for rocks. Why is this? Well, machines are sorting through all those beans and occasionally they mistake a rock for a bean. I think, in all the years I have sorted through beans, I have only found one small rock in some lentils. Oh, and sometimes there is dirt in the bag, which is a good reason to rinse the beans before you soak them.
- 3) **To soak or not to soak, that, for some reason, is the question.** A little culinary secret: you don't have to soak your beans, but if you don't soak them then you have to cook the beans longer (hours longer) and will need to add more water as they are cooking. If you would prefer not to be at the stove all day cooking beans then soaking is necessary. You want to soak your beans for 8-10 hours, but not over 12 hours. I soak my beans right before I go to bed and then start cooking them in the morning. You could also start them in the morning and start cooking them in the late afternoon. Soak the beans in a clean pot with room temperature water (important!) that is covering the beans by at least 2 inches. For every pound of beans, you will want to add 1 Tablespoon of salt to the soaking water. Don't worry, much of the salt will drain away when you rinse the beans the next morning, but some will stay to flavor the beans.
- 4) **To drain the water or not to drain the water, that is another question.** Some people say that you want to drain and rinse the beans after soaking overnight. Some say you don't need to drain and rinse. I say yes, yes you do! You are less likely to get gas from beans if you drain and rinse them before boiling.
- 5) **Cooking and flavoring your beans.** And now for the fun part! You are going to boil your beans for an hour or two (bring to a boil and then simmer) and this is your opportunity to make super flavorful beans. You can boil your beans in water, but you can also boil them in chicken, vegetable or beef broth. I like to add olive oil to my beans, but you can also add all types of herbs and spices. Greek beans? Add oregano and olive oil and then lemon juice at the end. Chili beans? Add chili powder, cumin and smoked paprika. Curried beans? Add curry powder, cumin and cayenne. So many choices! The great thing about beans is just how versatile they become with different flavorings. You can also add any combination of vinegar, Dijon mustard, tomato paste, diced tomatoes, honey, and/or molasses.

If you flavor them while cooking, you will have ready to eat beans when they are done. You can also just boil the beans with some salt and then use them later to make hummus, bean dip, chili or use for any number of recipes that uses beans.