

Cooking Class How to Cook with Dried Beans

Granted, cooking dried beans takes time, so you need to plan ahead. But creamy, flavorful beans are well worth the (mostly hands-off) wait. Our techniques yield perfect soup, and much more.

BY REBECCA MARSTERS



Hearty White Bean Soup is just one of hundreds of ways to take good advantage of dried beans.

HEARTY WHITE BEAN SOUP

Serves 8

You can substitute collard greens or kale for the Swiss chard. In place of the cannellini beans, you can use any small white bean, such as great Northern or navy beans. Cooking times for all dried beans can vary depending on the age of the beans; taste the simmering beans often for doneness.

Salt and pepper

- 1 pound (2½ cups) dried cannellini beans, picked over and rinsed
- 6 slices bacon, chopped fine
- 1 pound Swiss chard, stems chopped, leaves sliced ½ inch thick
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 celery ribs, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 carrots, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 8 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes

1. Dissolve 3 tablespoons salt in 4 quarts cold water in large container. Add beans and soak at room temperature for at least 8 hours or up to 24 hours. Drain and rinse well.

2. Adjust oven rack to lower middle position and heat oven to

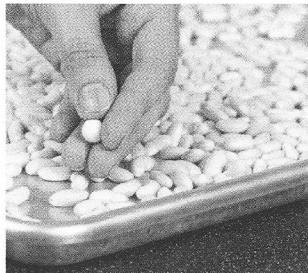
250 degrees. Cook bacon in Dutch oven over medium heat until crispy, 6 to 8 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer bacon to paper towel-lined plate. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from pot.

3. Return now-empty pot to medium heat and add Swiss chard stems, onion, celery, and carrots. Cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are softened and lightly browned, 10 to 12 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in broth, 3 cups water, bay leaves, rosemary sprig, and soaked beans. Increase heat to high and bring to boil. Cover pot, transfer to oven, and cook until beans are almost tender (very center of beans will still be firm), 45 minutes to 1 hour.

4. Remove pot from oven and stir in Swiss chard leaves and tomatoes and their juice. Cover pot, return to oven, and continue to cook until beans are fully tender, 30 to 40 minutes. Discard bay leaves and rosemary sprig. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Stir in reserved bacon. Serve.

▶ We often cook dried beans in chicken broth. To read our chicken broth taste test, visit CooksCountry.com/chickenbroth.

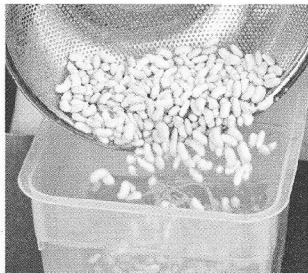
STEP BY STEP Perfect Bean Soup



1. SORT AND RINSE

Pick through the beans for any pebbles or debris and rinse the beans.

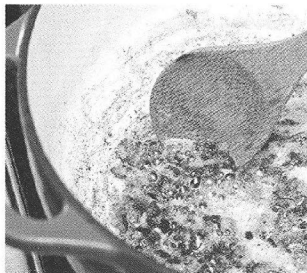
WHY? Bags of beans often contain foreign matter that you don't want ending up in your soup.



2. BRINE BEANS

Dissolve salt in cold water, add the rinsed beans, and soak them for 8 to 24 hours.

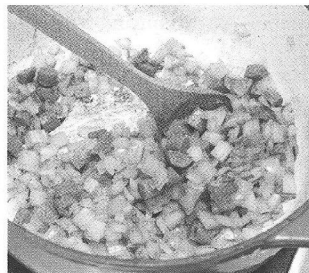
WHY? An overnight soak starts hydrating the beans to reduce cooking time.



3. COOK BACON

Sauté the diced bacon until it's crispy and then set it aside.

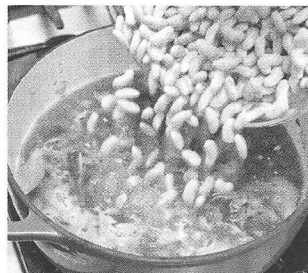
WHY? The bacon fat gives the soup a savory, smoky base flavor.



4. SAUTÉ AROMATICS

Cook the vegetables in the bacon fat until they're softened and browned.

WHY? The browned vegetables will add a layer of flavor to the soup. We add the Swiss chard stems now so they can soften.



5. ADD LIQUID AND BEANS

Add the chicken broth, water, brined and rinsed beans, bay leaves, and rosemary sprig to the pot.

WHY? The beans need to be cooked in plenty of liquid to fully soften, and the chicken broth will make the soup taste better.