



Full of (Better) Beans



We know: Cooking beans from scratch is time-consuming. But in these lean economic times, it might make sense to stop popping cans. The savings: up to 80 percent, depending on the variety of bean (a 1-lb. bag equals about three to four 15-oz. cans). Plus, there's the earthier flavor and creamier texture of cooked beans—and they have a lot less sodium. Here, the how-tos.

THE BUY Head for a store with high product turnover—older beans take longer to cook and are less flavorful and tougher in texture. Store them in their bag or in an airtight container in a cool, dry spot. (If you haven't cooked dried beans within six months of purchase, use them in lieu of pie weights when blind-baking piecrusts.)

THE PREP Sort through beans to remove small stones and debris. Place beans in colander and rinse well with cold water. Transfer to large bowl and add enough cold water to cover by 2 inches. Cover and soak overnight at

room temperature for 12-24 hours to rehydrate the beans and rid them of hard-to-digest complex sugars. (In hot weather, refrigerate during soaking to prevent fermentation.)

COOKING Drain beans in a colander, and rinse well with cold water. Transfer to a large pot and add enough cold water to cover beans by an inch. Heat to boiling. Skim off foam and reduce heat. Cover and simmer 30 minutes. Add ½ tsp. salt. Continue simmering until beans are tender (about 45 to 75 minutes longer, depending on variety). Remove from heat and stir in ½ tsp. salt.

STORAGE Cover leftover cooked beans with some of their cooking liquid and place in an airtight container (allow head-space if freezing). Keep in the refrigerator for up to 5 days, or freeze for up to 6 months. To thaw, simply microwave on high for 4

minutes (make sure the container is microwave-safe), stirring halfway through, or transfer beans to a saucepan, cover, and heat until thawed over medium-low heat. Drain, rinse, and proceed with your favorite recipe.

—Sherry Rujikarn

Bean Counter

A cup of dried beans will double or triple in volume, depending on the variety. That means a 1-lb. bag of dried beans will yield...

- 6¼ c. cooked black beans
- 7½ c. cooked garbanzo beans (chickpeas)
- 6¼ c. cooked pink beans
- 5 c. cooked pinto beans
- 5 c. cooked red kidney beans
- 6¼ c. cooked white kidney beans (cannellini)