

Beans, Beans...Really are the Magical Fruit

by John Rizzo

Legumes, or dried beans, such as navy beans, lentils, great northern, garbanzos, black beans, split peas, and kidney beans to name a few, are a great source of protein and fiber, low in fat and loaded with nutrients.

Legumes can provide protein levels similar to beef, pork and chicken while completely omitting cholesterol. Although legumes are high in carbohydrates, which is your body's main energy source, the high fiber content slows the pace in which your body absorbs the sugar; consequently having little effect on your blood sugar level.

If given the choice of starting with dried legumes or canned; most chefs and nutritionists would prefer using the dried. Canned generally contain added sodium and sugar. When preparing dried beans, soak them overnight; occasionally changing the water to rid the indigestible complex sugars that can create gas in your intestine. Cook them long and slow until tender, again frequently changing the water.

Beans are somewhat interchangeable within your recipes. If you don't have the exact bean the recipe calls for; don't be afraid to substitute what you may have in the cupboard. I've used cannelloni beans in chili, garbanzos in minestrone; and was never questioned. Your dish may look different, but I can assure the flavor profile will not have any discernible difference. Of course I may make the exception with split peas. When things start turning green, you may have crossed the line.

Chili

Yield: 4 quarts

Onions, Diced	1.5 cups
Ground Tomatoes	28 oz.
Tomato Puree	28 oz.
Water	3 cups
Salt	1 TBL
Red Wine	1/3 cup
Kidney Beans, Drained	40.5 oz
Sugar	2 TBL
Ground Cumin	1 TBL
Green Peppers, Diced	1.5 cups
Celery Diced	1.25 cups
Garlic Minced	1 TBL
Hot Sausage, bulk	1 Lb
Ground Beef	2 Lbs
Chili Powder	2 TBL
Oregano	2 tsp

In a large saucepan, brown the ground beef and sausage; continue to cook until the water evaporates and the meat cackles in the pot. Add the onions, peppers, celery, and garlic; cook until soft. Add the chili powder, cumin and oregano; cook for one additional minute. Add the ground tomatoes, puree, and water. Bring the mixture to a boil and reduce heat to simmer.

Note: Any combination of tomato products will work, including ground, diced, puree, paste, and sauce. The mixture should be a little thin to start; it will thicken as it cooks.

Let the chili cook for about an hour or until it reaches your desired consistency. Skim any fat that forms on the top. At this point add the beans. *Dried kidney beans work well also; but they'll need to soak overnight, and then cook them separately in water until tender.*

Let the beans cook for 20 minutes. Add the wine; salt and sugar to taste. Bring back to a boil and remove from heat.